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THEY FOUND GOD

An account of some
little-known holy lives

Edited by
MR L. CHRISTLIEB

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P R E F A C E

IN our noisy and restless days, packed so full that the daily pace and pressure seem to leave many of us little time for pondering the real meaning of life, it may be helpful to consider others who trod the ways of earth before our day and to discover how they came to be so sure they had solved this problem. They believed they had solved it. Though weighed down by troubles, pressed upon by duties, beset by fears as we are to-day they did, somehow, achieve seeing the light of another world illuminating this one and shining on their own path, not always clearly or unintermittently, but sufficient to conquer, in the end, temptations and darkness; they achieved an ever-renewed purpose of turning towards this Light and submitting to its action which created within them an unassailable peace and certitudes so strong that no suffering, not the most extraordinary, could shake them.

Is not what they struggled for and found the key to the riddle of our human existence? Would their answer be, "We are here to become spiritual personalities"?

The literature on saints and mystics is a vast one. The conviction of the need to bring home afresh, and in every possible way, to our generation the necessity for rediscovering God must be the excuse for this contribution. To the possibility of such a rediscovery many minds are best led by abstract thought and reasoning, but to others it is illustrated by concrete examples of men and women who although they lived in intellectually simpler times, when the facts of religion were not questioned on every hand, nor divorced from daily activities as they are to-day, yet had to contend with the same human circumstances which beset us. They too had other people to deal with, material needs to satisfy, outward adversities and inward confusions to battle against, a lower nature to withstand, an uncertain future to march into courageously,

fears to cast out by attending to the greater fear of missing their true End. In these circumstances they demonstrated that within the limits of bodily existence with all its ills and of earth conditions with all their trials, a human being can become more than conqueror over both, and thus inspire us with a fresh vision of what, in our turn, Christian living may mean.

The material for the stories of the lives here presented has been collected mainly from Gerhard Tersteegen's *Leben heiliger Seelen*, first published in 1735 and now unobtainable. Only those have been chosen from Tersteegen's extensive volumes who are little, if at all, known to English readers. The names of Suso and of Catherine of Genoa are of course known; but besides Von Huegel's massive volumes on St. Catherine and a book on Suso the writer could discover no further information accessible to English readers on these two saints, and none on the others.

M. L. CHRISTLIEB

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THEY FOUND GOD

I

ARMELLE

SHE was a servant all her life, living in other people's houses and in subjection to their will. She never learned to read and write. What we know of her was written by a friend, an Ursuline nun in a convent at Vennes who took down what Armelle told her.

She was born in 1696 as the daughter of a peasant, George Nicolas, at Campenac in France. The family was poor and every child had to work as soon as able. Armelle herded sheep when still very young. The quiet and solitude awoke and developed in her the desire to think about God and to pray; the sight of a crucifix called up in her a deep love of the Saviour. She too desired to love; if a poor or hungry person came her way she shared her food with them, or, as often, gave it to them wholly. In her home she was obedient to her parents, all her sisters and brothers loved her specially because she was ever ready to serve anyone in whatever way she could.

This, to us moderns, sounds rather too good to be true; but may there not have been other examples of a childhood and youth which "grew in grace and favour with God and with men"? Trials, however, began in due course.

When about twenty years old, Armelle's parents wanted to arrange a marriage for their daughter. But the girl had no inclination for this. Country life where she could not easily withdraw from dances and other customary amusements which in those days were often coarse and licentious, became very distasteful to her. She sought service in a neighbouring town. The opportunity soon came; a lady who knew her

and had long desired to have her in her house, offered a post, and the parents, very unwillingly, consented at last to let her go. Armelle was happy, because now on Sundays and holidays she was no longer compelled to join in dances and frivolities but allowed to attend church. Indeed, her mistress loved her like a daughter and found only the one fault in her that she worked too hard. Armelle herself, however, began to feel that this place, where she could do as she liked and had every wish granted, was not a permanent one for her; she felt irresistibly urged to seek another and after two years her mistress most unwillingly let her go. She entered service in several houses after this, meeting always the same treatment and appreciation. Then one day a Carmelite nun suggested that she should enter her sister's service, but warned her that she would not find good days there. Armelle heard in this the call of God and took the post offered.

At first all went well. Armelle specially liked the custom they had in this house of reading aloud for a while from some good book. She begged the daughter of the house to read to her at other times also. Once the whole story of the Passion was read to her. This had an indescribable effect on Armelle who had hitherto known no details at all, only that the Saviour had been crucified. Her mind seized on one event after another, her whole soul melted in grief and love, for she seemed to hear interiorly the words: "it was love that caused Him to suffer thus." The world vanished from her sight. One alone filled her horizon, Jesus. Deep repentance and a hatred against all sin filled her heart which at the same time overflowed with the desire to serve Him and to suffer something for Him. She told no one save her confessor of her experiences and prayed to remain hidden with Him, "as the chicken under the hen's wing."

More than a year passed in this inward state of fervent love and penitence. Then her spiritual discipline began. It was as if the forces of evil were allowed to attack her.

All within her changed. Instead of the glowing love hitherto experienced she found herself wanting to hate God, even to despise Him, so great a distaste for everything good possessed her that any spiritual exercise became intolerable. Instead of being penitent, she became hard and unfeeling, and seeing herself thus, rage and despair of her salvation attacked her. She used to be able to praise God and thank Him for everything as a loving child; now a spirit of blasphemy filled her mind. The cherished thoughts and memories of Christ's suffering and death vanished as if she had never heard of them; instead she felt set in a company of devils who were constantly inciting her to surrender to them.

But the grace of God kept alive in her heart a fear of offending Him which prevented her from altogether succumbing to her plight. Apart from this one lively fear she felt entirely forsaken and despairing; she could neither think of, nor do, anything which brought her the least comfort. Her confessor to whom she told her troubles pitied her and sought to help her, but in vain.

Six or seven months passed in this condition. Then a ray of divine light shone in her soul. The fierce assaults of the enemy were beaten back. It happened suddenly one evening. Like the psalmist of old she cried, "My God, Thou hast torn my bonds, and freed me from the power of my enemies! Oh Love, I will love Thee and serve Thee for ever! With Thy weapons I will beat down the power of hell!" The fire of love burned again in her soul; she longed and thirsted after God as one almost bereft of her senses, running from room to room in order to find Him, calling aloud for Him, at the same time yearning to die so as to be united with Him whom her soul loved.

Lent was at hand. Going to church on Good Friday and hearing a sermon on the Passion she was seized by such violent emotion that she had to leave the church. She hurried home, threw herself on her knees in her chamber, and cried aloud,

"Thy mercy, my God! This is the day when I must become wholly Thine. Let me be Thy true disciple. Let Thy love possess me. Reveal Thyself to me! Let me be united with Thee!" In the midst of this prayer, when she hardly knew what she said, she felt urged to climb up to the highest attic in the house where she sank on the floor unable to stand, and there such light flooded her soul that she knew her burning desire had been fulfilled: God Himself had come and made His abode with her. A garment of light seemed to surround her; her heart was so changed that to herself she seemed another person. Her every desire was fulfilled; she knew not whether she was in heaven or on earth. The inward light shining on her was brighter than the noonday sun. Ever after she called this her happiest day, her Day of Blessing, the Day of her True Conversion. She now knew that God was never far off, she could ever find Him in her own heart. The Peace of God penetrated all her being, the love of God filled her wholly; victorious strength over all evil without and within was her armour.

But our mortal bodies which have become perfect instruments for our physical and mental activities, have hardly arrived yet at being instruments of the spirit. The flame of her inward love was too great for Armelle's bodily health; a violent fever attacked her which kept on for five or six months and weakened her greatly.

Her biographer does not tell us what the family in whose service she was thought of their servant's spiritual visitations; perhaps they were hardly pleased? Then the illness formed the climax. It changed the respect and kindness with which she had hitherto been treated into the very opposite. Her mistress found it tiresome to be saddled with a sick servant. She believed the reason of the illness was just laziness and the extraordinary fervour nothing but exaggeration and immodest zeal. A neighbour to whom Armelle had opened her heart in all simplicity declared her state to be due to an

unbalanced or feeble brain and advised forbidding her all devotional practices, and in order to heal her keeping her constantly occupied, otherwise she would lose her reason altogether.

Thus fortified in her own view, Armelle's mistress began to pile one labour after another upon the sick girl, at the same time ordering her follow servant to spare her in nothing, but to leave the hardest jobs always to her. From morning till night Armelle now had never a moment's rest, in spite of her feverish condition. One day, utterly exhausted, she fainted. Her mistress insisted that it was all imagination, and that more work was the cure. She now made her fetch water from a distant spring outside the town. The carrying of the large heavy vessel on her head caused the girl intolerable pain.

To add to this, though obedient to all orders while strength held out she could not please her mistress any more. Nothing she did was right. Over every task she was scolded and found fault with. But she never showed any sign of impatience or annoyance, and never uttered a word in excuse of herself, however unjustly blamed. This very meekness added to her crosses. It was taken to be sheer stupidity, her silence was not a virtue but lack of any sense to answer; everyone in the house despised the witless creature who could not say a word in her own defence.

One day she sank down on her bed worn out with fever and overwork. But not for long; her mistress came up and scolded her for being lazy and foolish, it was only silly fancy that she was sick, she was to get up at once and carry manure into the garden. Armelle rose and obeyed without opening her lips, though her whole nature shrank from carrying those loads on her head which already ached unbearably. For two whole days she had to continue with this task. The thought of the crown of thorns sustained her.

Not a day passed without similar trials. Armelle confesses

that at first she found it very hard to bear the constant blame and unjust accusations quietly, especially when they were not made privately but in the presence of others, as they generally were; indeed, the worst things were said to her when the most people were present.

Her victories were not easily won. She tells us that she constantly longed to answer back, at least to explain and excuse herself. Only with the utmost efforts did she choke it all back. And while she was thus hard beset the idea rushed into her mind that not even an angel would keep quiet if treated thus; it was really all her own fault to have to endure this; she would be treated much better if she showed her indignation; her silence only made them think her an idiot. Frequently, too, she felt urged to leave this place; she knew that her relations would receive her gladly; anywhere else she would find more ease and rest than here; if her health finally broke down here she would be nothing better than a suicide. But she recognized these and similar thoughts as subtle protests of the self-love still lurking in her being and quietly persisted in her way of not attempting to justify herself, however great the provocation.

The powers of evil against whom St. Paul says we have to fight, must surely view with dismay a soul growing stronger and stronger in love and endurance. If

“Her fortress is a faithful heart”

they doubtless would direct all the battering-rams they could find against this fort threatening the borders of darkness!

Armelle's mother came and made urgent representations to her daughter not to allow herself to be thus put upon, finally she begged her with tears to leave this place. Her confessor, too, told her she had better go away. Armelle replied: “Am I to flee from suffering? Shall I forsake the cross? I cannot do that, not until I am forced to; if I had to suffer a thousand times more I will not run away.”

Her mistress threatened to send her off. Indeed, she did dismiss her several times, and Armelle was packing her things to depart. But at the last moment something always happened to prevent her going. She spent about five years in this house, and no one ever heard a word of impatience or complaint from her during this time.

To us of the twentieth century, with our perception of what is due to ourselves, our need of self-expression, of developing our own personalities, such submission to others who were plainly in the wrong, such suppression of our ordinary rights and human dues seems perhaps exaggerated. May be. But would many of us have the strength of soul to do likewise? Perhaps Armelle *was* developing her personality? Perhaps this dumbness was her way of preparation for true self-expression? But how did she manage to do it?

"It seemed to me," she said, "my sufferings were nothing to what I desired to suffer following the example of Christ. His image was ever before my eyes; as He was instructing me inwardly as a teacher and I was listening to His voice as a pupil, always seeking to learn from Him, I scarcely took heed of how I was treated outwardly. I was shut in with myself; I held on to the divine Love, and did not lose sight of His Presence. I conversed with Him, rejoiced to suffer a little for Him, and asked Him for a measure of that patience He showed in His own earthly Life."

Perhaps anyone always "listening to His voice as a pupil" could learn to do it?

The tide turned at last. One hot summer day Armelle had to accompany her mistress when she went to bathe in a brook. The mistress noticed the girl standing by the water in a reverie, apparently lost to her surroundings.

"You silly creature," she addressed her. "What has taken you now?"

Startled, Armelle replied innocently, "I am thinking of

the sorrow in the soul of the Son of God when He went over the brook Kedron."

"Who told you that the Son of God went over the brook Kedron?" asked the mistress.

"I do not know," replied Armelle, "but I feel sure that it happened." Tears were flowing down her cheeks, and her face shone with loving devotion.

Her mistress looked at her. Her eyes were opened at last. She saw what others in the house had already seen for some time, that Armelle had been greatly wronged. Her behaviour that had looked so blameworthy now appeared in a different light. The silence, the patience, the meek submission which had been called stupidity and idiocy now received their true names. Henceforth Armelle was treated with affection and sympathy. She herself had not to learn a new feeling towards her oppressor. She says she loved her all the time, and always spoke of her as the one to whom next to God she owed most. "She helped me to find my true life," she said gratefully.

St. Peter seems to have had the same idea when he wrote (1 Peter ii. 20) of taking it patiently when buffeted for doing well, and even asserted that "hereunto were ye called," a call to which individually and nationally our modern world has grown somewhat deaf.

In Armelle's life it now became clear that the divine intention in sending her to this house had been fulfilled. She had nothing more to suffer, and when the daughter of the house married and moved to a distant part and wished to take Armelle with her the wish was granted, although the mistress was now very unwilling to let the faithful servant go. But she herself was glad to go right away and be free from the constant urgings to marry with which her friends and relations ceaselessly pestered her. Her longing now was to be back in the country where she hoped to enjoy even more undisturbedly the life of intimate communion with God.

But for those who are to climb high earthly life often continues to be a discipline; if not outward then inward.

Since that unforgettable Good Friday when the Lord had manifested Himself so overwhelmingly to her soul not a day had passed in which she had not been conscious of His presence in the ground of her being; her soul was filled with love towards Him and a peace so deep ruled in her heart that all outward annoyances and trials could be borne not only patiently but with joy. This state had now lasted for four years, and she never doubted its continuance in the quiet country life in which she now found herself.

But a different and very hard school awaited her. The sense of God's presence departed; peace fled; instead, thoughts and inclinations to evil besieged her mind. No taste for virtue remained, all gifts and graces forsook her save, as before, the one fear of offending against God. Yet this too increased her suffering; for to herself she seemed to be offending Him all the time. Her imagination was filled, she says, "with the most terrible images, such as only hell could send." The heart she had so rejoiced in believing to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, was now ringed round by spirits of impurity tempting her to shameful things; nowhere could she find a ray of comfort or relief in her misery. It was as if God and all good had forsaken her.

For two years this condition went on. Then one day when she felt herself driven so violently by unclean impulses that she did not know how to control herself she ran out of the house to a lonely meadow; in a hidden corner she threw herself on the ground and wept heart-brokenly. "My God," she cried, "is this wild fire to devour me? Are these earthly desires to possess the heart I gave to God? What I always turned from I now experience by violence and compulsion. My God, take me from this world before I offend Thee!"

Psychologists—or common sense—will find easy explana-

tions. The vigorous protests of the hot southern blood, the revenge of the denied human instincts. The kingdom of the body is a proud and wonderful one, and one accustomed to rule. Mankind has hardly yet reached the stage when the rule of Spirit over both body and mind is accepted.

Armelle in her hidden corner in the meadow says she "had reached the edge of utter despair." She did not know, nor do many of us, that what is required of us is that *our will shall hold true*, whatever our deprivations, distractions and temptations may be. Her very prayer of despair shows that Armelle's will was true as steel and pointed Godward.

With astonishing abruptness the burden was removed. In one moment, she says, she was translated from a state of utmost misery into one of utmost bliss. It was a change as from death into glorious life. Love and gratitude for this immeasurable mercy so overwhelmed her that physically she almost succumbed. For an hour she lay and could not move, indeed scarcely breathe, but lay there as one dead. It was again an hour in which God took complete possession of her soul.

Afterwards she frequently used to say that through experiencing disorderly affections she was freed from the ill she most dreaded; that as the blind man was cured by unclean clay she through these strange means was given that greatest good which she most fervently desired. Her heart was now, she declares, as in an impregnable fortress where no enemy attack could reach her.

She passed on into another class in God's school. Illness attacked her. For about four years she had to suffer greatly. Sometimes she passed whole days, left entirely alone, in great pain. The biographer does not state this, but one may hazard the guess that her country life was now on a farm where everyone had their work to do, and no one time to look after a sick servant. When a little better she was received as a lay servant into an Ursuline convent. Here one nun became

specially her friend: to her we owe Armelle's biography. Everyone in the convent soon learned to love her; her weak health received every consideration and care; the nuns sought every opportunity to have speech with her and hear her talk of the holy love of Jesus. The boarders too, for whose service she had been engaged, respected and trusted her, her mere presence inspired such reverence that it sufficed to keep good order among them.

After four years among the friendly and sympathetic nuns her health was completely restored. She again began to feel that life here was too easy, that God would have her go elsewhere. She returned to her first place, where as far as we know she remained for the rest of her life.

When she was sixty years old her leg was shattered by the kick of a horse, so that for fifteen months she could not walk and suffered greatly. She thanked God for this as for a special grace. Sitting in a corner of the kitchen she ordered the affairs of the house, or was occupied with such domestic tasks as she could perform; she was never seen idle. People of all classes visited her and found help and inspiration in her exemplary patience and spiritual conversation. Asked whether she did not miss going to church and to Communion, she replied, "To suffer for Love is better than to enjoy Love. God can give Himself at all times and in every place to a heart that means only Him. I love the Will of God as I love God Himself."

She recovered sufficiently to be able to walk again, first on crutches, then with a stick. But the pain in the injured leg persisted until the end nine years later when, after an illness of some months which she bore with joy, she entered the wider life. The last words heard from her were: "Jesus, Jesus."

"This little flower for her grave," says her biographer, "I picked in her own garden": "God has sent me into this world that I might love Him. And through His great mercy

I love Him so much that in the manner possible to mortals I cannot love Him more. Therefore I must go home to Him, that I may love Him in the manner of the blessed ones."

* * * * *

A sketch of her life seems incomplete without the addition of some of her actual sayings contained in her biography.

"I asked our dear Armelle once," writes the biographer, "to tell me by what means and exercises she had progressed so far? What were the motives of her actions? What was in her mind while she worked?"

"You must ask Love," she said, "if you want to know about my life. For to love, and to love every day a little more, is the only art I know. Love taught me everything. I am the child of Love, and the Lord, my Love, is my Father and guide, holding my hand in all I have to do. I only have to follow Him. My eyes, through His grace, are fixed on Him without ceasing so that I think of nothing else all day; or if I do lose sight of Him I immediately seek His presence again.

"I do everything I have to as if I had only this one thing to do, without any sense of hurry from which my divine Love keeps me, for in the turmoil of many claims by which I was surrounded I could not keep myself. Before every duty I place myself before Him as a servant before his master, or a pupil before the teacher, and realise it as His commission.

"During my work I talk with Him as with a friend, I love Him and rejoice in Him. Even when my work demands my whole attention my heart is always turned to Him. When the work is finished I hurry back to Him. He taught me that as long as I looked toward Him I should not sin, nor cease to love Him. He gave me a greater desire to fulfil my duties as a domestic servant than to enjoy meditation and prayer. Indeed, I found Him much better at my work than

at the wrong time in church. To keep to my converse with God was my real and ceaseless, as it were my only duty, within or beneath all other duties. Did a brief time of leisure occur, I sought immediately a quiet place, not in order to pray exactly, I was not thinking of that, but just to love; I found the divine Mercy ever ready to receive me. This love made the most difficult things easy, undertaking everything for me, swallowing up all the hard parts.

“When I wake up in the morning I throw myself into the arms of Love like a little child. I arise with the intention of serving Love and pleasing Him in all things. If I have time I kneel down in God’s Presence, speaking to Him as if I could see Him. I give myself to Him, asking Him for wisdom and strength to do His holy Will. Talking with Him, praising Him, fills every gap between my duties. In those former years there was frequently not enough leisure throughout the whole day even to say an ‘Our Father.’ But this did not trouble me; working for Him pleased me as much as speaking to Him in prayer. He taught me that all I do out of love for Him is true prayer.

“I dressed in His presence, and thought gratefully of His love which gave me clothes. I then went to my work, but without leaving Him; nor did He leave me. He worked with me, and I with Him, as close to Him as in prayer. What wonderful company in all my difficulties! Affording me such courage and strength in all that seemed hard that everything was done easily.

“When eating He was as near to me as always; I received every mouthful from Him; I believed He gave it me Himself to nourish my body and to increase my love. I cannot describe the effect this had on my heart.

“When my body grumbled and complained because of the constant effort and lack of rest and desired some ease; or when anger or some other bad disposition arose in me, I was immediately recalled inwardly by the Saviour and admonished

to suppress such movements of nature, and not nourish them by any word or deed. He Himself was the guardian of my mouth, and the watchman in my heart, suppressing the very germs of evil.

"If through carelessness or forgetfulness I had committed a fault I could not rest till I had found forgiveness. I wept at His feet; I told Him my fault as though He did not know it already; I confessed my weakness and said I could not leave Him till He had forgiven me and restored the friendship between us, which He always did; so that my very faults helped to inflame my heart afresh for Him. At other times the hasty words I was about to utter stuck fast before they were uttered; I remembered I was in the Presence of God and thought, how can I say this before His very face?

"When evening fell I sought my rest in the arms of divine Love. I slept on His breast as a child on its mother's. I loved and praised Him till sleep overtook me; but frequently my emotions were too strong for sleep, so that I could serve Love which never left or forsook me, for a great part of the nights also."

This uneducated woman found helpful food for thought in common daily things.

"When I lit the fire with one little spark I said: Oh Love! If only each soul let Thee work in her; how soon all would be aflame with love for Thee! When I had to prepare the meat of slaughtered animals I heard my Love say, For you I let myself be killed, to serve your soul as food. When I saw a poor dog faithfully following its master I felt ashamed and longed to hang on to God with the same constancy. The lambs in the fields letting themselves be led to the shearing or slaughter without crying out, spoke to me of the Saviour's willingness to go to death. The flowery meadows taught me to pray, make my soul a garden to which none but Thee has the right of entry. The trees moved by the winds in all directions, the sea never passing its borders, made me ask

to be always as ready to be moved by the Spirit of God, and always to keep within the bounds of His will. The fishes swimming happily in the sea taught me that my soul must abide in its element and find its joy in divine Love. When the fields were cultivated I seemed to see the Saviour, working hard all His life to plough up souls and to sow good seed, and I was much pained to think that there was so little good ground. All natural things and creatures taught me something; and I often said, how kind of Thee, my Love! thus to help my ignorance, for me who can neither read nor write to show such large plain letters in nature that I need only look to understand thy love better."

To read of her riches one could almost pity the overstocked, overfed modern mind.

"On Sundays and other holy days I was allowed to attend church, but afterwards had to work the whole day in the house. During the sermon I listened with such reverence and attention as if God Himself were speaking. I prayed for all my fellow listeners that His word might be fruitless with none of them. For the preacher too I asked for power to move our hearts to the love of God.

"Sometimes there were dances and amusements and I was invited, but excused myself. I much preferred the joys which intercourse with God brought me, and these were the greater the more I could be alone. When people were astonished that I liked remaining in the house by myself, I thought, if you only knew what wonderful companionship I have you would not call it being alone. I am never less alone than when I seem to be alone. My Sundays passed much as my working days. Indeed, I often had to work harder on Sundays. But work or rest, difficulties or ease were the same to me, for I did not look at what I had to do but at Him for whom I did it; His love so filled me that I had not time to think about myself.

"In all that happened to me I turned to Him; I told Him of all my affairs and needs, I asked for all we had need of, for

myself and for all men, my brothers. He never turned me away; He fulfilled all my desires; I spoke to Him as to my most intimate Friend. He heard me, let me feel His kindness, and see His secrets. Whenever I turned to Him as a poor ignorant and simple pupil He took away my doubts, created light in my darkness, taught me to avoid evil and strengthened my weakness. He was all in all to me.

“When I consider the great advantages of being a servant I cannot cease to praise God for making me one. No other state in the world would be so dear to me. I can live in it quietly without any taking note of me. Who would think of paying respect to a poor servant? Anyone may rebuke her, look down on her, find fault with what she does or says. Is not that the most excellent school of humility? In what other state could one learn so well? For this reason should not all servants consider themselves fortunate? When servants complain to me of the very things which should help them, I am astonished; I say in my mind, if only you knew how salutary it is to be blamed and despised and kept strictly you would rejoice instead of grieving! But how few know the blessedness of suffering with Christ in being rejected of men and having to bear their contempt.

“To me it became a pleasure when I saw others preferred before me, when the least in the house held me to be lower than they. I learned too to take pleasure in taking the wishes and likings of others before my own. My old nature felt this to be difficult, but my spirit rejoiced in it. I liked submitting to the lowest as if they had been high saints, for I did not look at the person I obeyed but at Him for whose sake I obeyed. I did not serve men as men; I worked as if serving God Himself in His Presence . . . I do not know what it means to have an enemy—I never had one. Those one might call enemies I consider my greatest friends. I only distinguish them from others because I love them more. When anyone is rude to me he is immediately received into my heart and

has a share in my prayers, though I never thought of him before.

"In all ways possible to me I strive to win souls for my Love. I would willingly suffer being cast into hell, if by that I might prevent any soul for whom my Love died losing her way. I weep for their sins; I call to God day and night for forgiveness for them. When I perceive their spiritual dangers great anxiety and fear comes over me. Give me a voice to reach all the world, I prayed, to call to them to leave sin and love Thee! If only I could give my heart to them, or collect everyone's in mine! Then I should throw them all into the fire of Thy love. How can I live and see Thy love misunderstood or despised?"

Nor was it in interior ways only that her heart went out to mankind.

In a suburb of Vennes there was a poor man afflicted with such a revolting sickness that his own wife could not bear to remain near him. For whole days he was left alone in a miserable attic. When Armelle heard of this she hurried to him, cleaned and bandaged his sores, washed and fed him. She performed these services as reverently as if doing them for Christ personally. She visited him every day till he died. The poor old man was so touched by her devotion that he could hardly contain his joy when he saw her. "My misery was pushing me into bottomless despair," he told others, "she saved me from this."

Her confessor once asked her how she could keep the sense of God's presence when she had so many different duties to attend to? She answered: "If now, while I am speaking to you, Father, someone came who had something to say to me I should not turn my back on you or go away. I might turn my head a little towards the new-comer to listen to him, but turn back to you afterwards to continue our conversation. I should not have to remind myself or make a great resolve to turn again to you, I should do it

naturally, without thinking, simply because I knew you were here. It is in this way I am used to knowing God present without ceasing; this consciousness is now natural; I remain with Him without thinking."

And if we, walking to-day on low plains of the Christian life, look longingly on the heights of such to us apparently impossible attainments, we may take to heart some other things noted down by her biographer from her conversations.

"I am only a poor servant, the daughter of peasants. There is nothing in me to call forth special divine favour. If God has kept me from evil, should not you also become able to conquer all hindrances through His help?

"Let us be faithful! let us be faithful!" she repeated often. "There is no other way to serve God, than by faithfulness, but faithfulness without limit; and in small things as well as great.

"All who complain of poverty in the spiritual life are only poor because they choose to be poor. They shrink from the trouble of conquering themselves, though that trouble is less than that which they have to take to satisfy their desires.

"The longer we delay the harder it becomes; for our bodily desires have time to become stronger, and the spiritual ones weaker. Accept the grace offered now; it may be refused thee later on. To put off till to-morrow what one might do to-day is a sign of little love. Whoso has true love cannot rest till all demands of Love are fulfilled. That may be the cause why only so few make progress in good. They know what God is asking from them, but have not the courage to do violence to themselves. They put it off till to-morrow. To-morrow never comes. They become weaker. God, seeing their unfaithfulness, leaves them to themselves."

Asked for news one day she replied: "I have great news. But they are all of the love and the goodness of God. Have you greater news for me of that? Then tell me. I want more news of heaven. For it is usual when journeying to a country

where one intends to settle to get information about its inhabitants and their manner of living and also the best way there. I often ask the angels and the elect, my brothers, how they live in the house of my Father, in the heavenly country where I also hope to dwell. Such news I long for, but I get it only rarely. Most of the time I can only love Love."

Of those who visited her some testified that if they had never believed in the existence of God they would have become convinced of it by looking on Armelle. Her face, her manner were as a mirror in which it could be seen Who dwelt in her soul. So holy and lofty a reality radiated from her that those who saw her said, "here is the dwelling of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit."

* * * * *

God be thanked for His unspeakable gift.

II

THE MARQUIS OF RENTY

It is not often that we find lives whose record has been preserved through the centuries for their saintliness, in the high places of the world. They not infrequently began there, but of most we hear that they renounced their rank in order to serve God in simpler and socially less exacting circumstances. The subject of this sketch, though unwillingly, remained in his high station all his life.

Renty was born in 1611 at the château of Beny in Normandy. In his seventeenth year he went to the University of Paris where he studied science and especially mathematics with such zeal that he spared little time for recreation and pleasure.

On his way to lectures he often passed a bookseller's shop where he was offered a copy of the *Imitation of Christ*. The bookseller repeatedly pressed him to read it, almost forced it upon him against his will. When the young student ultimately read it the direction of his life and aims was changed. Then and there he resolved to leave the world and enter a Carthusian monastery. When driving through Paris one day with his mother he made an excuse to leave the carriage and then fled from the city.

A few days later he wrote to his father without, however, telling him where he was. "For some time I have been resisting the call of God in my heart. Now I find it necessary to leave the world as I have not the strength to work out my salvation in a place where everything is opposed to such a life. I see too many dangers for a weak man like myself, and would therefore choose the safe way. . . . Worldly maxims are in such contradiction to the principles of Jesus Christ that I cannot understand how a soul that is unwilling

to offend Him could live long in the world, especially at Court, without either keeping aloof from it, or joining it to its great peril. I know I shall be told I could live in the world without partaking in its evil. I admit this; but should I not become everyone's song? Would not you, my father, be the first to mock me? To me it seems safest and best to flee from the danger of losing one's soul for the sake of a little variety."

He met with neither sympathy nor encouragement in his choice. His father had him searched for everywhere. When at last he was found at Amboise he was taken back to his home at Beny. What happened there is not told us, save that young Renty "showed so much virtue, wisdom and skill that he gained general respect."

But not his original desire. Perhaps persuasions had their due weight; perhaps inner guidance pointed clearly to a different path. From his after life it seems now clear to us that he was called of God to demonstrate an example of saintly life not in cloistered seclusion, but in the open and difficult ways of the world.

In his twenty-second year he was married "to a very virtuous lady." According to the custom of young French noblemen he must have joined the army—though this is not expressly stated—for during the Thirty Years War we hear of him taking part in its campaigns. The biographer relates that even as a soldier on active service he practised constant prayer and meditation, and prevented acts of wickedness whenever he could. Once he came with his company of 120 cavalymen to a village at two o'clock in the morning. Every inhabitant had fled; but in one cottage he found a sick old woman, frightened and helpless. He gave her food and drink and also much spiritual consolation. Then she told him the Croats were to arrive in the place shortly; he should hurry away with his men. What she said turned out to be true; had he remained he and his small force would

have been cut up. He used to teach his men that it is a greater act of bravery to suffer wrong for God's sake than to commit it; that to suffer something was more heroic than to revenge oneself. For, he added shrewdly, one is much more difficult than the other!

The writer of Renty's story was more eager to show his saintly life than his worldly calling and experiences of which we should like to hear more. We infer that he lived the life of a French nobleman, not exempt from attendance at the royal Court. But when twenty-seven years of age he renounced this last and retired to his château at Beny. There, while otherwise remaining in the world, he gave himself up to prayer and service. Every night, even in the severest cold of winter, he spent two or three hours in prayer; one gathers, in an unheated room. When he arrived at an inn on a journey the first act in his room was to throw himself on his knees and pray. He never left a place without speaking to the house servants about God. His dearest endeavour was to teach his own children, to show them where worldly standards contradicted the Spirit of Christ, and that true nobility consisted in imitating Him.

The order of his day is thus described by himself: "I generally rise at five o'clock (after having spent a part of the night in prayer). As soon as I wake I sink myself into my ground of nothingness before the divine Majesty; then I unite myself to Christ and His Holy Spirit. After rising I fall on my knees and adore the benefit of the Incarnation which gives us access to God. After dressing (on which I do not spend much time) I go into my chapel and kneel down to worship God. I hold myself before Him as an empty vessel and think of myself as low and needy. I keep my heart in this disposition, then take refuge in God's Holy Son and His Spirit, desiring to please Him in all things; I remain in this intention. Then I read in the New Testament, and after a brief meditation go to my work.

"Before midday dinner there is another period of prayer. During the meal a helpful book is read. Afterwards an hour is spent talking with people who wish to see me. Then I go out where God leads me; if there is nothing special I often enter a church and pray there; every evening an hour is again given to prayer. During supper a portion from the lives of saints and martyrs is read; after supper I have a talk with my children. At nine o'clock I have prayers with them and the domestic staff, then all leave me, I remain in prayer till ten o'clock."

His outward way of living was one of extreme moderation, he ate little and dressed simply. His friends learned that it was painful to him to sit down to a rich table or to receive elaborate service. To make such innovations in his state of life must have meant a willingness to face many a condescending smile and derisive remark. "We have to conquer ourselves," he said to a friend who marvelled at the ease with which he bore annoyances, "till nothing is a self-denial any more."

While his inner life was assiduously fed and strengthened by daily and nightly hours of prayer he rendered service to others in all ways possible to him. The sick, the poor, the prisoners in his neighbourhood were visited. He came to be known as one ready to help in whatsoever chance offered for service. In all Paris and the region round about there was no public good work which he did not either originate or further, or both. Later on his correspondence extended throughout the country. His advice was asked on all hands wherever difficulties arose, whether in the erection of hospitals, the founding of seminaries, philanthropic societies, or any other institutions for helping men. Not only organizations of various kinds called out his aid, personal service to individuals was rendered lovingly. Once he said to an intimate, "I feel as if my soul were all love."

From his thirtieth year he fed some poor people once or

twice a week at his own table. On these days he would go in the morning to the gate St. Antoine, and after greeting them with courtesy take all the destitute he saw there back home with him. If it were winter he took them first to get warm by the stove, then he sat down in their midst and began to teach them. While doing this his face shone with such love and peace that his hearers gazed at him astonished. After instruction he brought them water to wash themselves, then seated them at table and served them with food. The dishes were brought by his own children, he himself waited on his guests. That they might eat comfortably and undisturbed, he allowed no talk in the room. After the meal he gave them gifts, and himself accompanied them back to their quarters.

Nor was it simply occasional meals. He was a friend to the poor in the whole country round, finding out their circumstances and the reason why they were in straits. Young people of both sexes he tried to get into good service; if a post could not be found immediately he kept them meanwhile in his own house. For destitute craftsmen he bought tools, or material; also giving them enough to live on for a few days, he searched for work for their wives and children as well; and later on took great pains to find a market for their products.

He went himself to a basket maker working in a cell and learnt basket making; then taught this craft to some poor people in the country to enable them to earn a living. Prisoners were not overlooked; his title and position gave him the entrée to gaols where he visited the inmates, cheered and teaching them and bringing them small gifts; when he got to know them and thought a man fit for liberty he brought all his influence to bear on getting his sentence shortened or remitted. Once in Pontoise when he was expected at dinner he did not turn up and could not be found anywhere. At last he was discovered in the town prison where he was sitting with the prisoners and sharing the me-

he had provided for them. He was talking with them all as a friend; taking special note of one man who was so hardened that no priest had been able to do anything with him. Renty's wise and earnest words, however, penetrated the hard crust; the man broke down and confessed his wrongdoing. A priest said in astonishment: "What we have not been able to do in three years Renty has accomplished in three days."

What was his secret? "It was his habit," writes his biographer, "before speaking with anyone, before intercourse of any sort with others, to give himself wholly to the Saviour, in order—as he said himself—to speak to them in His Spirit and with His power."

Renty had discovered the secret of "I am the Door." The door and the way to our fellow men.¹

Renty's influence, then, need not astonish us. Sometimes his mere presence sufficed. In the carnival season he once passed a house where the loud noise of carousing and dancing was heard in the street. He went in and looked on, standing there silently. The revellers looked at him and felt unable to go on. Then he spoke to them. All began to weep. A number of them started a new life.

He heard of a young man who had betrayed a girl and

¹ Compare F. Rittelmeyer, *Meditations*.

"What this saying 'I am the door' may mean I learned some years ago when I had to take religious instruction in a school and sought some help by being in the right mood for my classes. There came to my mind Christ's words, 'Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to me and I have manifested unto them Thy Name.' I felt these words should be the door through which alone I dared to go to my children. Through this saying, 'Thine they are, Thou gavest them to me, I must manifest to them Thy Name' through this, as through a spiritual door, ought I to go to the children. This thought has been of the greatest help to me. Not only for special occasions of teaching, but to every human being we contact Christ is the door. If we fail to enter through Him—fail to think of them in His Spirit: 'Thine they are. Thou gavest them to me. I must manifest to them Thy Name,' we risk being thieves and robbers of the lives we touch. Remembering to enter through Him we too shall find pasture."

deserted her. The girl was in utter despair. Renty sought out the youth, who met him at first with rudeness and violence. Renty held on. In the end the young man was moved to repentance. He married the girl, and they lived together in great peace.

Happy in his life of prayer and good works the Marquis desired nothing less than posts of honour in the world. But others sought him out. He was nominated to be a Royal Councillor. Little knowing our Renty, one of the inducements to make him accept this honour was the offer of a number of "Letters of Grace" (the possessor of such a one could not be taken to court in cases of litigation). These, he was told, were always given with the post, and meant a further income of 2,000 lire annually (presumably by their sale); thus he would have more to give to the poor. He answered that he himself had no legal quarrel with anyone; also that these Letters often oppressed and injured those against whom they were used (presumably their possessors could send others to court, while immune themselves). As to the second point, he had sufficient earthly goods for his own needs as well as those of others. Nor did he care for an office carrying many responsibilities which would of necessity entangle him in a thousand matters of business for which he had no aptitude. Should he be forced to accept, it would be laying on him a heavy cross.

It seems that in spite of his resistance this cross had to be carried; he was appointed in due course. Now, indeed, the world tried to be too much with him. His biographer says he had as much to see to as any man in the whole country. Business of many kinds claimed him. Parties had to be attended. "From all sides," he wrote to his confessor, "the claims of work call me. I do all I can, in its own time, without hurry. Our Lord gives me the grace of keeping me in His peace. I find this: the more I plan and arrange to do a great deal in this place or that, the less gets done. But if

I commit all my work to God much more gets done. Therefore I will let Him work."

Is this the simple remedy for our overworked modern world, for the harassed state of mind of so many Christian workers?

"For several months now," Renty goes on, "I have been overloaded with work. I have to see this person, then that, then wait upon the sick who seek me out, then go on journeys, then settle quarrels, then see to buildings, etc. If one could only pray on one's knees, I should have done my duty badly, for in these months I have hardly prayed three or four hours on my knees.

"But I am learning to know that one can do one's work with the point of one's fingers as it were, while the heart remains resting in God as a child in its father's lap. God impressed Himself so deeply on my inmost being that I might have been rolled about like a ball without losing sight of Him. Indeed, I was rolled about rather strangely; but such changes are for the soul's good; it learns to accustom itself to every kind of condition, to live not according to its own ideas and tastes, but according to the mind of God."

Not only in public life did he meet with trials. He and his wife lost a child they loved above the others. Nothing but the bare fact is stated by the biographer. Renty himself told a friend, "I cannot deny that my whole nature is suffering in this sorrow and loss. Yet in my spirit there is joy that I may offer and give to God my very dearest and most beloved."

His activities among the sick and needy suffered no diminution. In the beginning he used to drive on these errands in his carriage with a servant and page boy. Then he went without the page but still in a carriage with a servant. But as the difference between his way and Christ's dawned on him more and more he went on foot, followed by his man. In the end he went alone.

In order to help the sick he learned a little medicine and

surgery himself, he could open abscesses and bleed a patient when deemed necessary. He always carried some medicines with him; these he mostly prepared himself, boiling them at open fires where frequently the smoke and smell threw him into profuse perspiration. No service was too low for the Royal Councillor to perform. With his own hands he lifted the sick, made their beds, lit fires for them, cleaned out their vessels, tidied the little household. In Dijon he was once seen getting some glowing coal from a house and carrying it in a shard to a sick person's room.

In Paris he met a convent sister one day leaving a house where he visited the sick, and asked her what she sought there? She replied she was seeking Jesus; in the house she had just left His love urgently needed to be shown. Full of joy at this answer Renty said he too was looking for Him, would she go back with him into the sick-room? When the patients saw him they let out to the sister that he had been there that day already, had made their beds and prepared soup for them. The sister afterwards took him to other houses and hospitals which Renty then visited regularly.

Not only did he seek out the sick, they sought him. From great distances sufferers came to him. He was often so surrounded by miserable and wretched people that one could not reach him. In his own château at Beny he received patients afflicted with lupus or itch, and other repulsive diseases. He laid them in a good room and attended to them himself, nursing them with the reverence inspired by the remembrance of the words that what was done to the least of Christ's brethren was done to Himself.

Sometimes he was asked for his medicines by patients considered incurable, embarrassing him greatly. He told the prioress of the Carmelite nuns that a woman dying in child-bed and given up by the doctor asked him for relief. He knew he had nothing for such a case, his remedies were but simple and weak herbal preparations, "but I had nothing better.

I asked God to bless it, and gave it to her. When I visited her again she was on the way to recovery."

"Do you do this often?" asked the prioress.

"When I am asked," he replied. "These are poor people who cannot help themselves, nor do I know how to help them. But God is not tied to prescribed means or medicines. When we are at an end of our resources we must ask God in faith to bless the little we can do."

"Then that is a miracle," said the prioress.

"Does not God work miracles for us every day?" he replied.

"And you work them for the poor," she insisted.

"Call that a miracle what the Lord does," he corrected her courteously. "I do nothing, save give what I can. But look at it as you like; I am not thinking about it any more, I just thank God that she is better."

He heard that poor travellers were received daily in the hospital of St. Gervais, and given a night's shelter, but sent on without any instruction. He felt inwardly urged to ask the Superintendent for permission to visit them in the evenings when all were together. This was willingly granted. Thenceforward he came every night, winter and summer, through snow and rain, knelt down with them, taught them, sang with them and when there were cases of distress giving them help. He treated them with the utmost courtesy, spoke to them as to his friends, sometimes embracing them. One day a traveller recognized in him his feudal lord and prostrated himself before him. Immediately Renty knelt before the poor man, and would not rise until the other had done so first.

This nightly visitation he continued for several years, stirring and awaking many to a new life. In the end the example of this busy man of affairs moved neighbouring clergy to take over this branch of service.

How time was found for all these activities we are left to guess. This noble of the Middle Ages had some very modern

ideas. The conditions of the working classes troubled him. He conceived the idea of a kind of Christian trade unionism; not intended as a weapon against employers, but as a means of strength among themselves. What he aimed at was a repetition of the state of the first Christians, a Christian communism. To some extent he succeeded. In Paris he established a union of tailors, and another of shoemakers, also at Toulouse. The men pooled the whole profits of their labour, took what they needed for themselves and gave the rest to the poor. They had all things in common, work, meals, prayers, called one another brother and lived in great peace and concord. Renty was their president; he visited them often, knelt with them and in all things behaved as one of themselves.

Had this light been cherished in France, would not the course of history have been changed? Had there been a succession and an increasing number of such aristocrats, would the cry "Aristo! à la lanterne!" ever have arisen?

Past history is past. But it might not be an unfruitful line of thought to consider in how far it is in our power to affect the present course of history and to change an impending future?

What has been related may give the impression that Renty met generally with appreciation. No doubt he did often, but he also knew abuse and opposition. Once when he tried to bring a husband who cruelly maltreated his wife, even attacking her with a knife, to a better mind the man foully abused him and went for him with his fists. Renty, his arms down, slowly walked towards him. The man, oddly impressed, stood still, though still breathing rage and slaughter. When Renty reached him he lifted his arms and in the French fashion embraced him as a friend. The act changed the man, who thenceforward lived a Christian life in peace with his wife.

An old sick man, always grumbling and generally in a

morose temper, was visited by Renty, whose words, however, only had the effect of making him more cross; he told his visitor he knew much better himself and would teach him the proper way.

"I will listen to you willingly and with all my heart," said Renty. Whereupon the old man held forth at length. Renty listened courteously till he had finished and then took the man's own words and wove them into his message. His listener grew silent. In the end he too became a different man.

Renty's usual method when obliged to speak to anyone of a fault was to accuse himself first. Or sometimes he frankly asked the other to tell him his faults, adding if the other would render him the service of also showing him his, he would be deeply grateful. Once a man confessed to him that he had acted like a rogue. Renty immediately covered the confession by saying, "I have acted as a rogue, how often! towards my God."

Perhaps we feel a little impatience as we read of such disciplined and sustained goodness? It seems too superhuman.

So at all events some people felt in Renty's own time. Rumours were spread about that all his godliness was mere hypocrisy, covering secret sins. Someone took care the rumours should reach him and for a time he remained in retirement in his room lest his mere appearance in public should give further offence. The community in a certain monastery who had cause to be grateful to him and whom he might have expected to support him worked against him with the authorities. Knowing this he visited them, thinking perhaps to give, or hear, a word of explanation. "I met only with humiliation," is his report in a letter to a friend. "I took great care not to say a word to gain their favour; I spoke only what I owed to truth. For the rest, I let all flow over me, disgrace and humiliation though it brought. I am out-

lawed here—or as the scapegoat in the Old Testament, driven into the wilderness.”

But he had reached a stage when union with God was no longer disturbed by what happened to him outwardly. While loving quiet and the chance of meditation and prayer he still felt inwardly free when these were interrupted. “Can you keep to your daily two hours for prayer?” a visitor asked him.

“Whenever I can I have three, or four, or five hours for prayer. But if an opportunity to serve my neighbour arises I leave off without scruple. God has given me the grace of abiding in Him and to be separated from Him by nothing whatever. . . . Once when I was just retiring for prayer a poor man came and wanted help; this seemed tiresome, but I suddenly remembered that nothing would ever seem troublesome or disturbing if in all things we recognized the order of God in our lives.

“To keep him from becoming puffed up,” his biographer states, “with his great gifts and virtues, he met with much malicious misrepresentation and wilful misunderstanding, and that too from a quarter where he felt it most, his own mother. Her opposition and blame counterbalanced the sympathy and admiration of his friends all his days.”

In the spring of 1649 a very painful and distressing illness attacked him. To add to his suffering his mind was beset by many distractions and confusions, tempting him, he says, to feel and talk like a mad person. Yet the deeply established habits of his spirits held fast; resolutely he turned to prayer. Asked by a visitor how he felt, he replied: “The pain I have is so great that I want to cry out and groan and lose control of myself. But though I feel it all the time I can also say my consciousness is with God and not with the pain.” “Suffering is a gift,” he said another time, “a great grace, but how rare a one. True, many suffer, but how few bear it in the way Christ did. It is strange; we know that the only way in which He could enter His glory was the way of humiliation, agony

and the Cross. Yet we, His disciples, are always desiring a different way from His. Is then the disciple above his Master?"

No one heard him utter a word of complaint; when others condoled with him he turned it off by saying "I am not suffering, the love of God suffers all for me; however great my pain, I do not feel it because I pay no attention to it."

He took what was given him, asked for nothing; he let his nurses do all they wished without question. As long as he could he still cared for the poor, then commended them to his wife. "You will look after them better than I," he said to her. "Don't be anxious; what you give away will not diminish what you have."

After receiving the Sacrament he was quiet and silent for a long time. The doctors, who thought his illness to be the result of melancholy, asked him to moderate his inward devotion. He answered: "I have never felt such joy as on this day, because I believe I am about to go home and be united to God. I desire to depart and to be with Christ."

In the afternoon he asked that the windows might be opened so that he could see the fair spring day. It was done, and he called out, "Oh blessed eternal Day! The Light, the Radiance, followed by no night!"

His bodily agonies increased; when at their height he cried: "Courage! courage! eternity is drawing near!" Though he could no longer speak clearly those surrounding him caught the whisper, "I worship Thee! I adore Thee!"

The day he died strength returned, he blessed his children and asked God to keep them unspotted from the world. Seeing among his friends in the room a man of high rank he called him nearer and said, "One word to you before I go. The goal of life is to be perfectly united to God, and to be distracted from Him by nothing. Let us will to adore God's guidance, let us will to be faithful to the end."

Again he looked up quickly as if seeing something and was heard to ask "Where is the holy Child Jesus?" With failing breath he still murmured often, "Jesus, Jesus," and then gently fell asleep.

He died, says his biographer, or rather he ceased to die and entered true Life on April 24, 1649, after an earthly pilgrimage of thirty-seven years.

One feels envious of his record. Yet the way he went is not closed to any soul. Let us give one backward glance to a passage in his story:

"Sometimes I remain," he wrote to his spiritual guide, "for two hours in prayer without feeling anything special, indeed tired out by inner dryness and distraction. But be that as it may, I always start again, with new earnestness. And then sometimes such an inner strength is given me that all fatigue disappears, and I am enabled to continue, apart from the prayer time and place, during business and intercourse with men; and I may say that although I do my work and business no doubt often badly, yet in regard to prayer there is no difference in all my time, because at every time and in all things I am inwardly collected. I experience that Jesus Christ has established His kingdom within me."

III

MARINA OF ESCOBAR

IN times less sophisticated and materially minded than ours (though they may also have been more cruel and callous), did that more widespread simplicity of faith in God create an atmosphere in which heavenly things were more easily apprehended by receptive souls? Take an account like this:

"On Ascension Day I was led in spirit on a mountain where I saw Christ the Lord clad in a wonderful garment set all over with precious stones. These symbolized His merits. I was filled with joy to see Him thus glorified and ready to take His rightful place of dominion over all creatures. But I was sad, too, at His leaving earth and wept much. Then He said, 'do you not know that although I go up to My Father I remain with you?' Comforted by these words I asked to be allowed to kiss His garment. 'Kiss it,' He said; 'My merits are yours also.' 'How may this be,' I said, 'that Thy sinful servant should own treasures gained by Thy suffering and obedience?' 'Do you not know,' He answered, 'that children who do not slight their parents are their legitimate heirs and have a claim on all their possessions? Thou hast a rightful claim on My treasures and merits.'"

Or this:

"On May 6, 1628, when I was in great soul straits, my angels led me in a vision to a great river in order, they said, to refresh me. The strange thing about this river was that it flowed upwards. Its water was crystal clear, and the ground over which it flowed was pure gold, pearls and jewels. Although the angels led me uphill I walked without trouble or fatigue. They led me up to the throne of our Lord Jesus Christ which was the source of this river.

"When I reached it the Lord united Himself with my

soul; I had, interiorly, experiences which cannot be spoken of or described. The crystal clear river, I was told, was the life blood of the Lamb, the wonderful riches in it its power and treasures. 'Through this river thou hast mounted here; for all who through constant and true contemplation seek to be united to God have to sink themselves in the thought of His suffering and death.' Praise to this Redeemer who is Himself the Way by which we may mount to God.

"Another time the Lord said to me, 'Friend, come with Me. Thy heart is sad; but I will show thee wonderful things.' I threw myself at His feet and said, 'I will follow Thee where Thou wilt; but if it is Thy Will I am also ready to remain in this dung-heap.' As soon as I had said this I found myself in the depths of my own nature, which seemed changed into heaviest lead, nor did I see the Lord. But I did not trouble myself, only again united my will to His. After a while He appeared to me again and said, 'I only withdrew to see if thou wouldst humble thyself.' Then He led me into the heavenly Jerusalem. I saw a table, spread as for a feast; the splendour cannot be described. I saw many elect citizens of heaven sit down at this table—the secret spiritual food refreshing and strengthening innumerable spirits was God Himself. I saw a thousand other things and wondered much. I remarked specially some beautiful little dogs running about the festive table and joyfully eating the crumbs falling from it. It was God Himself who in the shape of crumbs came down to feed and make glad these little creatures. At His command an angel decorated each with a collar of flowers. It was revealed to me that the little dogs symbolized the contemplative souls still on earth who also are fed by this heavenly food, because they hunger only to know God, and have renounced the pleasures of earth."

Does it sound mediaeval to us to read of visions like these, quite unpractical and foreign to modern ideas?

Let us look for a little then at the human life of the seer of these heavenly—unrealities, would we call them?

Marina was the daughter of a Spanish professor of jurisprudence of aristocratic lineage, Jacob of Escobar. What we know of her life is taken from her own account of it, written in obedience to the order of her spiritual guide.

She was born in Valladolid on February 8, 1554. As a babe of three she was taught the two great commandments by a cousin. "What does it mean," asked the little one, "to love God above all?"

"To love Him more than father and mother and everybody," the cousin explained. The small child repeated to herself, "I love God more than my father, more than my mother, more than my cousin, and more than everything." She used to seek quiet corners to say this over and over again.

Can modern realists say what direction to the spirit, what atmosphere to the soul, this created?

When four years old she stayed with this cousin in a house beyond the town. A brook flowed between it and some meadows. One day she saw something strange in the meadow. The idea rose in the child's mind that it might be God. "I will go over the brook," she said to herself, "and look for God." But when her foot touched the water she heard a voice saying, "What are you doing? wait! where are you going?" "To look for God," she answered. The voice said, "I am God whom you seek. I sought you before you sought Me. Come with Me." She was led back to her own door. From that time she started to pray with great confidence and kept this up with all simplicity and regularity till her tenth year, when she returned to the house of her parents.

There this habit⁷ was rudely upset by the companionship of another girl of her own age who was given to joking at sacred things and who, herself very vain, led Marina to think

only of clothes and finery and to give up her devotional exercises.

"But I still wanted to be thought pious," she confesses. "For four years I remained in this vanity."

We may perhaps think it was as well that the young plant was not allowed to over-develop so early.

Help came to the child later on in the form of a preacher, "who was used by God to lead me back to the right way." She turned away from her worldly tastes and started again to pray and read good books, and to practice what she knew as best she could. For four years she continued thus. Then she was led into a different class.

"God allowed Satan to assault me; day and night I was beset by fears and frights, especially when I was alone and wanted to pray. My soul found no rest anywhere; conscience tormented me continually to such an extent that my body wasted away, and two or three times I came near losing my reason. My confessor could not help me out of this darkness. From my fourteenth to my twenty-eighth year I continued to suffer thus. The great Physician would have it so, because He saw that it was for my good."

She tried at this time to enter a convent founded by St. Teresa at Valladolid. Teresa first consented to receive her, but later on said, "No, God has a different plan for you." They remained, however, in friendly intercourse."

After these years of darkness relief came at last. A spiritual adviser counselled her to practice interior prayer. Every day she devoted some time to this. Consolation and strength came to her; she kept set times for intercourse with God every morning, noon and evening. "God was leading me as a weak child."

Then trials began in her home life. One member of the family started to persecute her. Even her parents, though there were plenty of servants, overloaded her with domestic duties to such an extent that she had no time to go apart and

pray. But she rendered all services required of her with great willingness of spirit, taking them as the Lord's command to her. "Through His great kindness I felt Him near even when most occupied; and as I tried as much as I could to remain inwardly collected I never lost sight of Him."

Yet the battle was not won. The hosts of evil appear to make special efforts to prevent a soul from reaching spiritual heights. Plausible thoughts occurred to her that interior prayer was dangerous; that many had been led into self-delusion along this way; that just to keep the ten commandments was safe and sufficient, while to meddle with higher matters presumptuous and risky. Frightened and confused she ceased from inward prayer. Soon the very inclination for it left her. Attacks of anger, depression and terrible fears beset her; she became a burden to her family by her fits of temper and sulks; all sense of God's nearness departed; yet the memory of having known and tasted His love remained; though that too seemed a torment because it caused her to long to be rid of this miserable life and to sigh in vain for a return of peace. Five years passed in this state.

"At last, in the thirty-third year of my life, the Lord in His mercy called me to Him for the second time. . . . He softened my heart and made it receptive to His grace. . . . Without my doing anything my soul was lifted into a wonderful state in which through an inward illumination I knew God, and also great and high mysteries. But I was rather like an ignorant peasant whom the king grants entry to his palace and shows him his treasures; the peasant only stares and wonders and asks what this or that means? Still the flame of love to Him was lit again in my heart and day and night I spoke to Him, seeking Him and giving Him my love."

At this time her confessor died and she chose one who was known to be very wise and spiritual. He perceived her to be a strong soul and put her for four or five years through

a spiritual discipline so severe that she calls it "a ceaseless crucifixion." Sometimes he mocked her, or spoke to her so scornfully and wrathfully that she trembled; he punished her for things she had neither thought, nor spoken, nor done, without allowing her to excuse herself or explain. Sometimes he drove her away without hearing her confession, alleging she was neither humble nor obedient, and left her unsuccoured for days. In the end she began to perceive that he did not find this severity easy; at long last he praised her for having come well through the discipline imposed.

To the modern mind, perhaps specially the Protestant modern mind, the idea of prolonged discipline is unattractive, not to say repellent. We would have saintliness on less severe and happier courses of preparation. And it is true that what suited one age does not suit another. But in blithely asserting this commonplace are we not apt to forget the force of Christ's example, "though He was a Son yet *learned* He obedience *through the things which He suffered*"?

Marina had come through her school unknowingly with flying colours. Now began for her a time of peace and joy, of loving God with all her strength continuously, also of extraordinary experiences and visions. She seems always to have resisted these, even to pray they might not come, or when they did to be removed. "But the Lord," she explains, "did not listen to my complaints. He continued to visit me and to do what seemed to Him good. . . . When God enables a soul to walk in these ways she grows quickly, and can progress far even in one hour through the abundant grace vouchsafed to her. But as the same medicine or food is not suitable for both the strong and the weak, so a new and untrodden way is not good for every soul; though neither is the ordinary way the best for all. The best way for each soul is the way God leads her. . . . I live now a double life; one is my human one in which I have intercourse with the people in the house and outside; and the

other a higher life, in another world, where I have intercourse with God and His angels and the inhabitants of heaven."

As with so many who walked the high road of holiness she constantly expatiates on what a modern poet calls "Man's Nothing-Perfect, God's all-Complete."¹

"I tried once for two hours in vain to meditate on the birth of Christ; not a word could I say to the Lord. Then He said to me, 'as you are always with Me and walking in My presence, what more do you want? Are not all secrets of My life and death in Me? Then tell Me what more do you want?'

"Nothing abases me more than to see God treating me so lovingly and intimately. I feel He should rather say to me, 'repent of your sins; fast on bread and water; sleep on the bare floor,' and such like. It is true He shows me my faults, but upholds me all the time and says it does not matter that I cannot perform penances, let me only do what I can. . . . Once when I felt sunk in the abyss of my nothingness and believed myself deserving of nothing but hell I felt suddenly translated into the presence of God. In deep shame I cried out, 'Lord, go away from me, I am utterly unworthy!' But He replied, 'do not you know that you cannot make Me unclean, but that I can cleanse you?' He approached me with such proofs of love that my tears were changed into joy. I felt cleansed, and wondered much to see myself so close to the Lord. . . .

"Once I prayed God with all my heart to let me live without committing the smallest sin, or do anything to displease Him. I asked this repeatedly. He said, 'My friend, do you will what I will?' 'Yes, Lord,' I answered, 'nothing else.' 'Then be silent about this,' He went on, 'I will give you what you ask so earnestly. But you should understand that the small faults of My friends have the same effect on

Browning, *Saul*.

their souls as water sprinkled on fire, it enflames it the more.'

"Some time afterwards when I had committed some faults I saw myself before the Lord in a miserable and dirty robe; I could not look at myself for shame, and said in deep humiliation, 'Oh Lord, how can you look on me like this?' But He said to some angels standing by, 'take off her robe that she may be cleansed.' The next day I fell into another fault, and again saw myself in rags, and all ugly, before the Lord, and again He gently and kindly gave the angels the same order which they obeyed. I said, 'Lord, how can You speak to me so gently when I deserve a sharp rebuke?' He answered, 'even if you fell a hundred times a day, if you confessed your fall I will cleanse you, and put away your sins as far as the heaven is from the earth. Only beware of losing courage.'"

After a fervent prayer that God might create a clean heart in her she had a sensation for two or three days that she had no heart at all. Then she saw in a vision the Saviour holding her heart in His hand. "Lord," she cried, "destroy this sinful heart and create it anew to be like Thine!" "The Lord," she relates, "looked at me and listened to what I said while He kept moving and turning my heart about. 'My Lord, my highest Good!' I cried, 'there, deep in the middle, there is the evil, destroy it, cleanse it, I pray Thee.' After some further turning it about in His hand He put it back in its place.

"For some months before this I had had the strong desire to possess God with all my being, and to be freed from all creatures, passions and defects. 'My God and my Good,' I prayed, 'have mercy upon me, and let me love Thee alone. Give to me, Thy poorest, some alms, even the smallest.' When I had said this I saw the Lord present with me; with great affection He said, 'My friend, I will give you what you ask.' Then He gave me something most beautiful and

precious, symbolic of the strength and glory of His merits. 'Take this gift, My friend,' He said, 'and keep it in your innermost heart.' Then I saw my heart glowing with beauty, sparkling like a ruby; in the midst were written with pure gold three lines,

"Here
dwells
Jesus"

* * * * *

Was it reality?

Only those can answer, and only those can judge who have in very truth "set their heart on God."

Very few of us have learnt to become at home with Him.

To be, as a prophetess of old, "never away from the temple," means being habituated to an order, to a rhythm, above that of our ordinary life, of our ordinary Christian life too. This, at the present level of humanity, is hard. For an atmosphere so rarefied few have developed the kind of lung needed. But that is not to say that to reach that order is not the goal of our race; it is rather to affirm that those who reached it are the real guides of mankind, in that they discovered for us our true direction and our possibilities.

From what has been said so far it would seem that Marina's life was one devoted only to meditation and prayer. That indeed is what she would have preferred herself. What exactly her outward manner of life was at this stage, is not clear; probably she was still at home, spending much time alone in her room. From this, in the year 1599, she was driven forth by divine command. "The Lord began to urge me to let myself be used for others. But because these urgings were at first very gentle I paid no attention. Then they became stronger and more frequent. I who loved to remain alone in my chamber and hold converse with God, complained to Him with tears, 'My God, and all my highest

Good! where am I to go? What is it I am to do? I pray Thee to remember I am a timid, weak, useless woman, easily frightened and with no gifts.' But He told me to be of good courage and go, He would help and instruct me.

"Some days passed thus, then I felt strongly urged to go to the Dominican monastery. What I was to do or say there I was not told. I started, in part full of courage and resolution, in part full of my natural timidity which I had to resist. I implored God for help. So I reached the monastery, and when there I was inwardly shown what to do and say. I asked for the Prior and told him of the commission I had from God. I went on to tell him that in order to please God he should detach his soul from earthly things, and learn to possess God in his heart and there converse with Him, also to teach this to those whom he would lead to perfection. The Prior listened with such love and humility that I well knew the words were the words of God, not of an ignorant woman like myself. He called the other clerics, and to them also I spoke. . . . This went on for several days. I had to tell them again and again how to unite the soul with God; the outcome of such union in the soul; what it means to know oneself by inner illumination, and what strength such knowledge brings, I had to say over and over in what way one may talk with God, and how God reveals His Will in ordinary as well as in extraordinary things.

"I began to take such joy in this work that I now sought nothing else but to further the welfare of other souls. In the street I spoke to people I knew and those I did not know, begging them to love God with all their hearts, and showing them how to begin, simply by talking with Him often. All to whom I spoke were so deeply moved that they became eager to hear more of the love and goodness of God; for a candle had been lit in their hearts. When I saw little boys in the streets I felt moved to speak to them too; I asked them if they knew the Lord's Prayer? If they answered 'yes,' I said,

'then pray it every day, you dear children, and ask God to make you His little servants.' The boys looked at me earnestly, and said, 'yes, lady, we will do that.' "

Now a great door and effectual seemed to be opened to her, as she was reaching many with her help and counsel. But where we might have been sure that the very best and most profitable thing for all was the continuance of her fruitful public activity a different plan became apparent. Marina fell ill. Thenceforward, for over thirty years until her death, she was a bedridden invalid.

But these years were the ones in which she saw heavenly visions, instances of which have been quoted in the beginning. To learn to live in heaven while yet on earth, to become able to bear, and to partake in, its piercing light and holiness, to be "at home with the Lord" here and now, and to have preserved for us the demonstration of such a possibility, that—we humbly acknowledge now—was a thought higher than ours.

Outwardly she often suffered greatly. Her fingers were drawn and bent, her whole body withered, and was never free from pain. To have her bedclothes changed caused her such anguish that this was only done once in eight months. Contemporary testimony asserts that the sheets taken away were as clean and sweet as when freshly put. She was then living with some companions in a little house of their own. Various women joined her, four of whom married later on according to Marina's advice; eighteen she helped to enter a convent; others remained with her. The little community lived on alms, and in the beginning were often in great straits; later on their needs were so amply supplied that the place became a refuge for many poor and needy. From her sick-bed Marina guided the whole household, even its smallest details, with wonderful wisdom; and though no convent rules bound the inmates, yet under her counsel and inspiration the women lived together in beautiful harmony and

devotion. Several of them added their written testimony to her own account after her death.

"I never once saw her angry," says one, "though she had cause often. She admonished us with a look, and that was enough! God had given her the grace to penetrate and shame hearts by her mere glance. . . ."

"All of us," says another, "vied with one another to serve her. There was strong competition amongst us for the longest periods of watching with her. When she spoke it was as if God were in her soul and speaking through her mouth."

The sick-chamber resembled a little prison; as she could not bear strong light the window was kept closed and curtained; only one candle burned feebly. Yet it attracted countless visitors who sought her counsel and intercession; to all she gave her help. Not always easily. "Once the Lord showed me in what great danger three or four souls were. He urged me to pray for them with sighs and tears. For fifteen days I had no rest, I could not get their desperate need out of my mind, nor cease from imploring help for them, till at last God revealed to me they were walking in a better way. He often showed me through a higher light the bad state of those who spoke with me, and also what to say to them; these admonitions came to me with such strength and clearness that I would not have been able to say anything else."

Who can gauge what forces of the heavenly world were moving in that small dark room and were set free to operate in ours, reaching and changing human lives, through her unconditional co-operation with the will of God? We know so little yet of the powers of human personality when it has reached the point of being joined to God (to whatever it is that corresponds to personality in the Divine Being) and become "free indeed" to execute His Will.

Take one of her visions as illustrating how her mind and will were working the whole time.

"I was led in spirit into heaven. Round me was that lovely air which I know as the 'golden atmosphere.' I saw the Lord and He asked, 'Soul, who brought you here? What do you seek?' I looked at myself and saw myself dressed as a poor pilgrim with a staff in my hand. Quickly I answered, Lord, I am a beggar and a pilgrim and have come to ask an alms of Thee. Grant my request, Lord. 'Willingly,' He said; 'take from this table what you will.' On the table I saw pearls and precious stones symbolizing different gifts: the gift of prophecy, of working miracles, of tongues, and others, amongst them I saw the gift of Conformity to the Divine Will. Longingly I stretched out my hand for this. The moment I had seized it inconceivably bright rays broke forth from the Lord, penetrating all my soul and senses, filling me with bliss, and forming in me as it were the Lord Himself. 'What are you doing, Lord?' I cried when I saw myself thus. 'Do not wonder at this, soul,' said the Lord; 'because you sought nothing beside Me, only to fulfil My will, I can give Myself to you.' I wanted to remain there, freed of earth, but the Divine Majesty said, 'the time has not yet come.' I wanted then to describe something of the way in which God's saints are blessed in heaven, but I found no words; these things cannot be explained."

Or other visions of showing her insight into divine mysteries.

"On Christmas Day 1619 I saw in my prayer a shining golden star. I took refuge in God as always and turned away from the star so as not to see it. But it was not possible, the more I turned away the more brightly it shone in my face. Wherever my soul looked the star was before it, throwing on it its radiant beams. Then the Eternal Word—which had taken the image of the Star—revealed itself to me and in spite of my resistance lit up my whole being. Seeing myself conquered I worshipped and adored the Divine Majesty in audible words. My soul now resolutely gazed on the Star

which increased in brightness and came nearer and nearer till it entered my soul which now also shone and became one with the divine Star. . . . I perceived how from all eternity the Will of the Father had been that the eternal Word should become incarnate in this world and redeem mankind.

"I cannot utter what the perception of this mystery awoke in my soul. I saw it without images or figures, only through an exalted inward illumination; it was as if I had been present at the incarnation of the Eternal Word. Only slowly I came back to myself, but this vision of the divine Star lasted for several days. And once when I went to Communion the Star again sank into my soul and changed into a little child. I wondered much, but the Lord said, 'do you not know of the triple birth? in eternity, in time, in the soul. That is what you have now seen.'

"Once when praying early I was lifted up in spirit to the heavenly Jerusalem. I found myself before a high mountain, rich with gold and precious stones. It was said to me, 'take courage, soul, climb this mountain, you will behold God.' I started climbing and found my soul lifted up to immeasurable heights. Then suddenly a Sun shone upon me, as lightning in a dark night will for a fraction of time illuminate all. I became aware of the divine Perfections, was swept away and entranced, and knew only God, God more and more, God alone. Then Christ the Lord led me down from the lofty height and explained the great and high mountain of rare gold and precious stones signified the high and blessed state of the soul that is to be lifted into union with God; it symbolizes that all that is not God, not His Love, not His will, has to be left behind, trodden underfoot, be it small or great, natural or supernatural, so that the soul may treasure Him alone, lean only on Him, not even on divine gifts and graces. These are the Golden Mountains which he who wants to know God must climb."

Thus in that shuttered room, often prostrate with pain, with the burden of the domestic arrangements and the greater one of keeping a household of women in harmony and peace, as well as of meeting the demands of many visitors upon her, Marina lived with God and saw heaven open.

The human lot of suffering she tasted to the full. We meet allusions to what she had to endure in her autobiography. In 1615 she wrote, "the pains, oppression and helplessness of my body were unusually great, also my soul was sometimes left in darkness. But I was contented, knowing God saw it and would have me accept it gratefully." In 1623, she wrote, "the food and drink which the doctors make me take caused an anguish as if a red-hot sword were piercing me. All medicines had the same effect. My body, all its senses, were being tortured, I was lying like St. Laurentius on the gridiron. But my one great anxiety was lest I should slip from being united to the will of God. When the pain was too great I lamented aloud, saying 'the pains of death got hold of me,' but was immediately afraid that my complaint was wrong. But the Lord looked on me with pity, and said, 'soul, what is it? what do you want? You have Me, I am with you.' I answered, 'I want only Thee.' Nevertheless, the agony increased. For a day it departed, then returned as before.

" 'Lord,' I said another time, 'when such terrible suffering comes upon me both in body and soul, I feel as if Thou didst not love me.' I heard the answer, 'what think you? was Christ beloved by God when He was delivered into the hands of sinners? You are treated as He was.' 'Would you rather,' He asked me once, 'be loaded with pains and distresses, or regain your health?' I answered, 'death sooner than be well and apart from Thee.' In my zeal I wanted to add, 'even if I had to suffer for all eternity.' The Lord did not let me finish but said, 'not to all eternity, only for a short while.'

"In 1619 God had sent me a message through an angel to say 'as long as you live you will not lack pains and dis-

tresses. Have courage to suffer, God wills it so.' 'Then I will it also,' I answered, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord.'—I live and am crucified, but do not desire to be freed from the cross."

In her last illness suffering reached its height. Beginning in the side the agonizing pain spread to all parts of her body. The doctors were helpless; her companions stood round her weeping with pity, unable to ease her. Even in her extremity she said, "in God's name let all suffering His Love sends come to me." It came indeed; the agony grew so fierce she groaned day and night and when it reached an unbearable pitch cried aloud. Suddenly all pain ceased, she fell into a trance until she passed on July 9, 1633, in the eightieth year of her life.

IV

NICHOLAS VON DER FLUE

ABOUT a quarter of a mile from the lake of Sarnen—which at one time no doubt formed part of the lake of Lucerne but is now separated from it by the swampy valley of the Sarner Aa—lies the village of Sachseln. In these days it is a popular summer resort; visitors to the church are shown the High Altar under which rest the bones of Nicholas von der Flue; his portrait hangs in the Sacristy. Good pedestrians will also climb to the Flühli Ranft and even higher up to the Flühli Inn on a spur of the Sachseler Grat; near which they are shown the house where Nicolas was born. But another spot, a secluded cave in the mountain-side, a little lower down on the slopes of the Ranft, may attract them more. Near it is an inscription in the rock, of a very unusual, indeed unique, character, of which more presently. There may be those who, looking round on the beautiful and wild mountain scenery, may stop to wonder whether the air—or the ether?—is still impregnated with the faith and love of a soul who lived here alone with God five hundred years ago.

He was born on a farm in this mountain region above the beautiful lake in 1417. In childhood and youth he helped in its work and was a lad noted for his courtesy to everyone and for his merry looks. But another trait struck his contemporaries most. When returning with others from the day's work he used to fall behind, and when he believed himself unobserved find a hidden place for prayer, then came home later silently and alone. His parents wisely refrained from asking him questions, they even pretended not to notice his ways so as not to disturb his inner growth.

(A query arises. Reading of their sagacity and willingness

to grant liberty, are we moderns correct in speaking of one's prejudiced parents and elders as "mediaeval"?)

A neighbour, Erni Rover, who was his friend and playmate, spoke in later years of remembering young Claus often leaving him and the other boys and hiding in quiet places. Even fasting he practised as a boy, but tried to keep this hidden from everybody.

His inclinations then evidently were towards the life of a solitary. But his parents thought a man's natural life would be right for him, unless God called him to something else very specially and plainly. Of this Nicholas, whose name was generally shortened to Claus, did not feel sure, while love and filial obedience seemed a plain duty; he followed their advice and married. In course of time he became the father of ten children, five sons and five daughters, whom he brought up with great care and affection, training them in all the ways of godliness.

One of the sons later entered the Church; another, John von der Flue, was elected to the office of Amman in the lifetime of his father.

During these busy years of engrossing family cares and affections, of labour on his farm and of public duties, Nicholas held fast to the practice of prayer. At midnight when he believed all in the house to be asleep he arose and remained until morning in intimate talk with God. One of his favourite oral prayers was the following:

"Lord, take away from me what turns me from Thee!
Lord, give me what furthers me towards Thee!
Lord, take me away from myself and give me to Thee!"

These practices of devotion and inward training of the soul had to be maintained in circumstances often unfavourable. The times were unsettled and threatening. War actually broke out; Claus was called up and had to join in the campaign of his country. The biographer gives no details,

only relates that though Claus was repeatedly forced to take part in fighting he kept to the practice of prayer on active service as in his own home; he also did what he could to prevent plunder and to protect prisoners and widows and orphans.

In civil life he was noticed to possess a special gift for making peace between quarrelling parties; for this reason he was unanimously elected to the office of Councillor, though he greatly disliked all public offices or positions of honour. Only often repeated requests induced him to accept this office. How he filled it one may gather from his words: "I have often been asked for advice in the affairs of my country, and I always gave my opinion. Through the grace of God, I cannot recollect ever having acted against my conscience, I never looked at the person; I never departed from the right." If to-day's language had been in use in his day, he would no doubt have summed up "I never compromised."

But the odds against plain adherence to righteousness became stronger and stronger. Claus saw so much injustice and dishonesty in the political and public life of his time that it seemed impossible to him to remain unspotted from the world if one had part in it. He was repeatedly elected *Landamman*¹ but steadily refused to accept it. To-day we may think that a Christian saint at the head of public affairs would be a splendid thing, and declare it a pity that he refused it—but perhaps reserve of judgment would be wiser. A soul may recognize a path as its own at which the world shakes its head. It is also possible that God may see a man's destiny to be the demonstration of His power in one special way.

Many thoughts must have passed through the mind of this middle-aged man, settled in a happy home, busy with his family and public affairs. Could not a man best serve God where He had put him? That many inward struggles took

¹ *Landamman*, the President of the Council of the Canton, the governing body for all administrative purposes.

place we may infer from a vision he had, and told his intimates of. It happened when he was sitting alone in some Alpine meadow praying. Suddenly he saw by an inward sight the vision of a beautiful lily which was growing from his heart and mouth reaching up to the sky. He was regarding it with joy when cattle came into the field, and with them a fine horse. He looked particularly at the horse, saw the lily bending down towards it; the horse snapped at it and finally devoured it.

What did it mean? Claus asked himself. Perhaps it was a symbol of the love of a creature becoming a danger and causing harm? He resolved to place his whole devotion henceforth on God alone.

Day by day this temper of mind strengthened. He felt inwardly driven to a life of complete seclusion. How to effect this in the circumstances in which he found himself was puzzling; earnestly and fervently he sought guidance in prayer. Then he heard clearly the inner command in response to his prayer: Be careful for nothing. You are resolved to seek only God; then be without any other care. Forsake all you love; you will find that God cares for you.

He now told his wife of his resolution and asked her, for the love of God, to give him her consent and to help him carry out the divine will. He explained that his home and farm and worldly affairs would not suffer through his absence, for even if he remained he intended to delegate them to others. But without her consent he had no liberty to carry out his purpose. After many talks together, and after she had asked counsel of her relations she consented to his following the inner call. Nicholas now put all his affairs in order as if he were about to leave them by death. He sent for his children and his relations and told them of his unshakable resolve, thanked them for their love and friendship, admonished them with many words to hold fast to God, "also he comforted them all, especially his wife and

children, by reminding them of their meeting again in heaven, kissed them, gave his children his fatherly blessing, commended them all to God and asked them to remember him in their prayers, and thus parted from them."

Who can relive in thought that heart-rending scene without being moved? And to how many then, as to us now, did it seem unnecessary and fantastic?

Clad as a poor pilgrim he left his home, barefooted, bare-headed, carrying no bundle and without any money.

First he wandered in the direction of Basel. But a peasant with whom he fell into conversation advised strongly against his settling in that region. After asking God to lead him where He would have him, he returned to his own canton of Unterwalden, to the Melchtal, a valley not far from his home, and there hid for eight days in a thorn thicket, absorbed in prayer and meditation. But a hunter discovered him and told others; soon the recluse was disturbed in his solitude by many who came to gaze on him from curiosity. He sought the greater loneliness at the very end of the valley, doubtless wild and lonely in those days, and there built himself by a cave a little dwelling where he remained until his death nearly twenty years later.

The greater part of the night and the whole morning he spent in prayer and meditation and would not see anyone. In the afternoon he walked about a little in the valley and saw visitors. For as soon as his peculiar way of living and the holy manner of his thought and speech became known, people flocked to see him from all parts, the learned and the simple, married folk, working men, children, officials, came to him; to all he spoke with love, save to those who came from mere curiosity or even the idea of tempting him. Such as these he refused to see. But to others he gave unstintedly of his inward treasures; none went away un comforted or unhelped; scholars were astonished at his wisdom, though unlearned himself—it is uncertain whether he ever learned

to read—he solved their doubts and uncovered to them their ignorance in spiritual things. The mere sight of him inspired reverence; he was of tall and dignified appearance, but so lean that his bones could be seen through his skin. His voice was strong and manly, he spoke slowly and distinctly; a greyish brown coat reaching to his feet was all the clothing he wore, head and feet were always uncovered. His face had a radiant look; the peace of God deep within him shone from his eyes. To everyone he said at parting, “my son, my daughter, pray to God for me.” His wife and children were allowed to come and see him at intervals; he encouraged them to walk in the love and fear of God. But of temporal things he spoke with them no more.

From the day that he went into the wilderness he took neither food nor drink save the host for nineteen and a half years.

Reading this statement we instantly find it incredible. So did his contemporaries. When the rumour of his perpetual fast got about all were offended, both temporal and religious authorities.

The civil authorities took it upon themselves to unmask this cheating anchorite. Unknown to him they had him watched day and night for a month. Finding rumour had spoken the truth they confirmed it publicly.

Then the bishop of Constance took the matter up, visited the recluse himself and ordered him to take food. But when he saw that in obeying his order Nicholas had to suffer unbearable pain, indeed wellnigh died, he left him to his special way of life. Nicholas himself always asserted that partaking of the body and blood of Christ preserved and strengthened him sufficiently. He must have descended for this to the church at Sachseln where later he was to rest.

In old-fashioned German spelling the inscription over his rock cell runs thus:

"Bruder Claus von Flü ist gangen von Wyb und Kinder in die Wilde, Gott dient zwanzighalb Jahr ohne libliche Spys, ist gestorben 21. Merz 1487."

"Brother Claus von Flue went from wife and children into the wilderness and served God for nineteen and a half years without bodily food and died 21 March, 1487."¹

In the year 1481 the Swiss Cantons were at loggerheads among themselves. The Diet was held at Stans in the Canton of Unterwalden. Many struggled to preserve peace, but every proposal of conciliation was rejected by the assembly; tempers hardened and became heated, obstinacy held sway; one attempt after another to avert disaster and still find unity failed; civil war was imminent. In anger and despair the delegates parted in the evening, the morrow was to see the declaration of the end of union and of peace; civil war and with it the ruin of all Switzerland could no longer be averted.

A local pastor, Heinrich von Grundt, hearing of the imminence of the danger, arose and ran in haste through the night to Brother Claus (as he was by then universally called), represented to him the impending ruin of their fatherland and implored him to come to Stans with him forthwith. Nicholas heard in this the call of God; the two walked back together through darkness and dawn and reached Stans on the lake by morning. They went straight to the Council Hall where the delegates were about to break up the Assembly and with it a united Switzerland. All gazed in astonishment and awe deepening into reverence at the

¹ There are other instances of prolonged fasts. There is now living in a Bavarian mountain village a peasant girl who is stated to have taken no solid food since December 1922. Till September 1927 a little water was taken. Since then, neither food nor drink. The episcopal authorities of the diocese sent a commission of four nuns who were qualified nurses, to examine whether the fast was authentic. They watched uninterruptedly for fifteen days under the directions of the doctor in charge of the health bureau who came any time day or night without warning. Then an episcopal report was published to the effect that the fast was a proved fact.—Roy and Joyce, *Theresa Neumann of Konnersreuth*.

strange figure standing suddenly in their midst, and waited silently for him to speak.

"Gentlemen," he began simply, "love for the welfare of our country and anxiety over the impending rupture and ruin into which your lack of union is about to plunge it, has brought me here from my solitude in the wilderness. I am wholly unfit to speak to a wise Council of State, for I possess no wisdom whatever. But what God has taught me, that I may tell you. Gentlemen, you who have yourselves received many benefits from God ought you not to show gratitude towards Him by serving your brethren and being at peace with them?" The historian does not record his further words—indeed they matter little. It was the effect of his speech that was so extraordinary. Like an audience of old who was smitten to the heart by the words of an unlearned man, the hearts of this Assembly were changed. Themselves, their country, the issues at stake, appeared in a new light. Humbly they asked Brother Claus's advice. A pact embodying his suggestions was drawn up on the spot and signed by all the Cantons without exception. The country was saved.

It is for this service to his nation that his name is held in honour in Swiss history. (Discerning readers of a modern Swiss Baedeker will not withhold their tribute when they see his "honourable mention.")

Was it for this act of preserving peace that he—not knowing to what end—was called to live apart? By the time this event took place he had spent about fourteen years in his hermitage. During them, did he, by entirely subduing the life of the body and keeping his spirit in hourly living contact with God Himself, grow to the stature of a spiritual giant, so filled with power from on high that he easily handled and transformed dangerous and perplexing earthly situations which to men's reason and sight seemed impossible to solve and to save?

Little indeed do we know of what one man can do who

boldly plunges for a life in a higher order, who "seeks God only and lets life go."

That he must have felt his life to be exceedingly rich, and that of ordinary people to be limited and poor, we may deduce from a vision he told of.

"I saw in my spirit a clear spring, from which waters flowed abundantly in three rivers, surrounded by a crowd of men working incessantly. To my astonishment they remained poor, in spite of their hard labour. Still less could I understand why they, poor and needy as they were, never went to draw from that spring which would have been so easy. I looked more closely at what they were doing and found that numbers of people in a vast field were running about among themselves like ants, loaded with cares and work. I saw one man putting up a fence; everyone climbing over it had to pay him a penny. One was building a bridge over water; everyone crossing it had to pay him toll. Some went about piping and singing, some were playing childish games. But all wanted only the penny. I saw shoemakers, tailors and other workers, all keen on the penny. Yet all remained poor. And no one came to the spring to drink from it."

"They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13) was perhaps the basis of this vision. We do not know if Brother Claus could read, he is stated to have been unable to write, so must have dictated the few letters and short treatises ascribed to him, from which a few quotations may be made witnessing to his spiritual insight.

"Thy failings are due to thy desires ever driving thee outside thyself. Return into thyself and bear thy shortcomings unmoved. Learn to have patience with thyself, then thou wilt have it with others.

"No one can harm thee, except thyself. Therefore fear none but thyself, and never trust thyself. . . . Hold on to

this ground truth that of thyself thou art nothing and canst make progress only if God enters into thee and orders thy life. But to receive this life thy will must be growing into His will, and thou must willingly accept all He lets happen to thee.

“Observe thyself if thou wouldst know what parts thee from God. It is sin. That stands ever in the way of union with God. The soul lacks but one thing—God. What separates thee from Him and Him from thee and prevents Him from doing His work in thee is this, that thou desirest to be something of thyself, and to please God through thy works. God does not want thy works, but His work. Hence all thy fears and troubles.”

The quiet years passed. Eight days before his end great bodily pains befell the hermit; he “laid him down with a will.” Thanking and praising God for His many mercies, he passed on in the seventieth year of his life. Nearly two hundred years later he was beatified by the Church.

To us who live in softer times of constantly rising standards of living, his story seems almost harsh and alien. We could not conceive of its repetition as a practical possibility. Very probably, for us, it may not be.

But the threatening circumstances of disruption, disunion, inflamed national passions, we see repeated in our time, enhanced a thousandfold. Thoughts, efforts, longings are concentrated against the foe. But sheer spiritual strength, authority learned from direct contact with God, and built up by years of entire selflessness and conquest of the lower nature, does not this remain a desperate need of our day?

MARIA GUYARD

"THE Teresa of the New World" Berniers calls her; for Canada became the scene of her activities for the latter half of her life. She was born in Tours in France on October 18, 1599. The following pages are taken from the biography written by herself¹ at the earnest and often repeated request of the son she had left in France, a request steadily refused by her until reinforced by the order of her confessor, Lallemand. After her death the son published it in Paris in the year 1677.

"From my childhood God prepared my soul to be His temple. When I was seven years old I dreamt I was playing in the court of a country school with my little friends. Suddenly I saw heaven open above and the Lord Jesus Christ coming towards me. 'Look, look!' I called to my friends, 'the Saviour is coming here!' I stretched out my arms towards Him. He took me in His arms and said, 'will you belong to Me?' 'Yes,' I answered; He looked at me with great kindness and returned. This strange dream made a deep impression upon me; a desire for good arose in my heart; I felt led to talk to the Saviour about my little affairs, it did not occur to me that He would refuse anything He was asked for in humility. I had never heard the words interior life, or prayer in solitude, yet I found myself urged to be alone when I could and to pray in silence.

"When I was seventeen years old my parents arranged a marriage for me. In this new state I had more freedom than I had had at home, also more distractions. But through the grace of God I had no taste for these; indeed, my desire to be alone steadily increased, also my love for God, though

¹ That is, from Tersteegen's German translation of it.

He was as yet unknown to me. I avoided the society of other young people, much preferring to remain at home and read good books. My neighbours could not understand this—indeed, I hardly did myself. I let myself be led by God in prayer, and practised whatever good He gave me the opportunity of doing.

“During the two years of my married life I had to suffer a great deal.¹ God was educating my soul. ‘If you knew (she wrote in a later letter to her son) how great was the cross of the wedded life in which I was entangled you would be astonished. I always believed, and still do, that I had to marry solely in order to bring you into the world and to bear many crosses; I gave you to God before you saw the light of this world.’

“When I was nineteen years old my husband died. This event caused scenes of a kind which would have been unbearable for a person of my age, sex, and inexperience. Only the words, ‘I will be with thee in trouble,’ kept up my courage. I steadfastly believed He was with me, because He had said so. So I was not disquieted; not by the loss of my earthly goods, nor the litigation ensuing, nor actual want, nor the fact that I saw my son, only six months old, deprived of everything rightly belonging to him. I had very little knowledge; but the Spirit of God within me filled my soul with hope and confidence. Then, too, my soul melted in gratitude to God that I was now free, and had only God with whom to have loving intercourse. My one thought was to bring up my son for Him, and to dedicate myself to Him the whole time.”

Here follow several chapters giving an account of her inner progress since she was eighteen; how the desire to

¹ “Her sufferings in her marriage,” says her son, “were so heavy, so peculiar and extraordinary that I cannot think they have a parallel in the world. In order not to offend against love I may not say more, save this, that her husband was the source of them all.”

communicate frequently grew upon her; how strength came to her in reading the Psalms in French; her growing delight in listening to preachers; the effect of hearing a preacher say the name of Jesus frequently, so that for days after her every breath seemed to repeat, "Jesus! Jesus!" How light increased in her soul and peace deepened, also her sensitiveness to her own imperfections. "What a wonderful teacher is the Spirit of God!" she exclaimed. "I have never had instruction in prayer or self-denial. I did not even know their names. Yet I was taught both interiorly."

For a time her outer circumstances favoured progress of the inward life. She had to discharge her many servants and kept only one maid. (One surmises that the husband's relations had robbed the young widow of all her property.) She was urged to marry again, but firmly declared that on no account would she consent to this. Her father then received her and her little son, not yet a year old, into his home. She was allowed to live in an upper room, where she "could work in silence and quietness." Whether this refers to inner or outer work is not explained; but evidently the family became dissatisfied with her retirement and demanded contributions from her on lines more familiar to ordinary people. She was allowed a year in the quiet upper room, but then was called upon to leave it and share with her sister and brother the burdens and demands of their busy life. Her brother was a "factor" in charge of the dispatch of goods throughout France, as well as of so many other kinds of business that he kept "the most numerous household in the whole country."

Into this tumult of affairs the young widow had now to enter and learn her share of work and business among the crowd of buyers, merchants, clerks, drovers and others. Her inexperience was no deterrent. All sorts of responsibilities seem to have been piled upon her. "Sometimes for whole days I had to be in a stable which had been turned into a

warehouse; sometimes I was down at the harbour till midnight checking goods being loaded or unloaded. Dock workers, carriers, carters were my company; also fifty or sixty horses which were in my charge. When my brother and sister were away on journeys, which happened frequently, I had to take over their responsibilities as well.

"But all this rush of work could not separate me from God. Indeed, I found myself strengthened in Him, because I did everything for love of Him and not for myself. God gave me grace to do all the things which were committed to me. At times so many labours towered one on top of another, each clamouring to be done, that I did not know where to begin. Then I took refuge in God and said to Him, 'My divine Love, it is quite impossible for me to do all this; will You please do it for me, or it will remain undone.' Confidence in His willingness to help lightened everything. While working I talked with Him; in the midst of crowds and claims on every hand I was as quiet and still as if I had been in a solitary wilderness.

"Sometimes I went aside for a little to offer my love to God. But as soon as I was called I returned willingly and said to God, "let us go, oh Love! it is Thy will. Enough if I have Thee. This work shall be done for Thee.' And because I thus did everything for love of God all I had to do became inexpressibly easy."

Thus Maria Guyard is another in the long line of saints who have demonstrated that God is greater than any situation which may arise in a human life, and that He can render adequate to meet its demands all those who turn in confidence to Him for help, however inadequate their natural human qualifications seem to be. Does it follow, conversely, that even in those regions which we feel competent to tackle with our intellect and capacities we are missing some higher mark? "Without Me," we are assured by the One Perfect Demonstrator of how human life should be lived, "you can

do *nothing*." Few of us believe that. Yet it is not only the experience of saints of old like Maria Guyard; their modern successors point the same way.

"In this life of God-consciousness is an immense sanity and poise," writes an anonymous mystic of our day, "a balance between soul and body and heart and mind never achieved in the 'normal' or 'natural' life. Therefore the God-conscious life is not to be named an abnormal but the complete, full, and only truly normal life: a life in which both soul and creature have found their centre, and the whole being in all its parts is brought to evenness, to peace, to harmony, and a greatly magnified intelligence. In this true life living and feeling alter their characteristics and surpass anything that can be imagined by the uninitiated mind."¹

It was not only in the pressure and claims of work that the young widow found her nature enlarged and her capacities enhanced, but in her intercourse with the rough men with whom she had to deal.

"I was always so happy among the people with whom my business lay that they thought I found a peculiar pleasure in their society. But what really made me gay and merry was the hidden union with God. . . . Sometimes I had no less than twenty of my brother's labourers round me. I sat down at table with them to have an opportunity of speaking to them about their souls. They told me their faults of themselves; or when accusing one another of neglect of duty it was accepted lovingly. At various times I collected them for instruction and prayer. When needed I reproved and punished them unhesitatingly; they obeyed me like children. I made some of them get out of their beds again if they had lain down without prayer. In all their troubles they came to me, especially when sick. I felt myself called to serve them; sometimes so many were ill that their room resembled a hospital, with myself as nurse. In ministering to their needs

¹ From *The Romance of the Soul*, by the author of *The Golden Fountain*.

I always imagined it was the Lord whom I served; so the labour was easy and full of delight."

It was always the inner life which went on in the midst of outward activities. "I spoke to God on the way to my work, in the noise of my domestic duties, and during intercourse with many people. My mind became as recollected and responsive to God as if I had been in a prayer chamber."

It cannot have been easy to attain this. The stretching and straining of our human nature, habituated to a very different consciousness, to reach unceasing God-consciousness must have entailed a discipline of the will which few are willing to undertake.

Like many another pilgrim of the inward way Maria had to pass through dark valleys and to meet Apollyon. Periods of happy communion were followed by others.

"The Lord allowed my soul to be assaulted by Satan, by the world, by my own self-love. I cannot utter the many thoughts that oppressed my mind, the more so because all was dark within and I had lost the clear sight of God and my soul's goal. Wherever I turned I found trouble and weariness of spirit. I continued my spiritual exercises, but they availed me nothing.

"Towards other people I became so sensitive that everything they said irritated me. I had to keep perpetual guard over myself to remain in meekness and not let my nature betray me. Through God's grace I do not remember showing impatience, however provoked, in all this heavy and difficult state in which God let me remain.

"The devil whispered to me what a fool I was to take all this trouble; there were many Christians keeping God's commandments and hoping to be saved, without all these pains. And why submit to a Guide? It was nothing but slavery. What evil was there in following one's own will? Indeed, this temptation grew so strong that it provoked me to exclaim: 'what is the good of all this? what end does it

serve? I will not be bound like this any longer.' But when I came to myself again I was ashamed.

"To let temptation reach its fiercest the Lord permitted several people to side with it; their talk was exactly on the lines of my own tormenting thoughts. I cannot describe my suffering. I was forsaken in my own soul; it became blunted and insensitive, I had neither strength nor courage to struggle out of my misery.

"But after the storm the Lord at length restored me to tranquillity. All the disquiet disappeared like smoke; I perceived clearly it had been a test. I was about twenty-five years old when I passed through these and other trials; the Lord made me understand they had been sent for my purification and to make me more receptive to His grace. After enduring them my soul became so united to God that nothing could disturb my intimate conversation with Him. Sometimes He did not leave me alone night or day. Often I found myself waking from sleep praying. When I had to talk to people my soul never turned her eyes from His whom I loved; and while listening to their answer I began speaking with Him again; the attention needed to listen did not interfere with inward recollectedness. When writing I had to double my attention so as not to forget God and at the same time attend to what had to be written. The moment of dipping the pen into the ink was precious, for it gave an interval for turning to God with the whole attention. Thus if the whole world had been present, nothing would have been able to distract my soul from God."

There *is* a way then, even if "the world is too much with us" to deprive it of its power, and to be more than conquerors over "things present."

"When I was rid of the bonds fettering me to the world" (we may presume this to refer to the time when she became widowed) "I had an urgent inclination to enter a convent. But the tender age of my little son did not permit me to

follow it. I had to see him through his early years. But when I was thirty I felt I must obey the voice which gave me no rest. I commended my father and my son to the guardianship of God and prepared to go. I was so filled with an inward strength and divine force that I felt I could pass through fire and flames."

Perhaps the fire immediately awaiting her was of an unexpected kind.

"Early in the morning of the Day of St. Paul's Conversion I left all, even the very dearest. My son, twelve years old now, accompanied me, walking quietly by my side. He wanted to hide his sadness from me, but the tears rolling down his cheeks without ceasing told me what his heart was feeling and aroused unbearable compassion in me. I felt as if my soul were being torn out of my body. I hid my anguish; I loved God more than all. We arrived at the convent, I gave my son into the hands of God and parted from him with a cheerful countenance.

"The Mother Superior welcomed me lovingly; a great peace came over me—now I was out of the world at last; after all the turmoil and pressure of the past unquiet years God had put me into this earthly paradise.

"Some days later a disturbance arose. A lot of boys, my son's schoolfellows, gathered round him jeering and mocking him that he had been so silly as to let his mother go into a convent; now he had neither father nor mother, and was forsaken and despised. 'Let us go,' they said, 'and get her out again! We'll make such a noise that they will be glad to get rid of her.' The lad, crying bitterly, agreed; the whole crowd of them arrived at the convent gate. There they started shouting and yelling that I should be let out and delivered to them; the din they made was such that it could be heard in the whole countryside. I heard it, and did not know at first what it meant. Then amid the shouting I recognized the voice of my son, crying out as loudly as he

could, 'give me my mother! give me my mother!' My very heart was cut in two. Yet at the same time I was filled with fear lest the sisters might tire of the uproar and send me forth.

"I had many times to suffer much on account of my son, but the Lord did not deprive me of the sense of His presence."

Maria Guyard's problem is still with us; her agonizing grief is the experience of many missionary parents, and the boy's sense of loss and bereavement that of many children left behind. The writer remembers a letter written by a child at home in an institution to parents abroad: "How I envy those children who have their father and mother with them, and can ask them anything they like whenever they want!" Heart cries like this must often ascend in our days. The sacrifice continues to be made; who knows what invisible fortresses of unworldliness and faith in God they build here and there in this poor earth of ours, overwhelmed otherwise by tides of materialism and self-seeking?

Entrance into the convent did not bring to Maria a cessation of inner discipline. At first, indeed, she experienced wonderful divine visitations; thus one evening when the bell was ringing for prayers, while she was kneeling down, "I felt a great change take place within me. It was as if the words, 'If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him,' were pressed deeply into my mind, and the promise fulfilled in me. My spirit was wholly drawn away from earth. Wherever I went I said, 'Thy testimonies are real; making wise those needing light. Send me into the world to tell them to those not yet knowing them.'"

But later in her autobiography she speaks of humiliating inward temptations with which she had to contend for several years. At such times she lost all feeling, all light and desire for good; was tempted to blasphemy, unchastity, pride and even to suicide.

The tactics of the powers of evil seem to follow a certain similarity. One also wishes that the poor distressed saint had understood something of modern teaching about the inner life, the law of work and rest; of tides, or of breath, going in and out; of what Von Hügel speaks of as "being in consolation, and being in dryness."

But though not as wise as we conceive ourselves to be she learned to conquer in all these experiences, and to get ready for the call awaiting her.

"When I had reached the age of thirty-five something happened which I always seemed to have expected, but had resisted. An apostolic spirit possessed me; I seemed to be translated to India, to Japan, to America, to all countries in the Orient and Occident where there are human beings; I felt them all to be the rightful property of the Lord Jesus Christ and presented them as such to the Eternal Father. It is time, I said to Him, that Thou give my Lord who died for them His inheritance. I know enough to make Him known to other nations, give me a voice reaching to the ends of the earth and tell them that my divine Love is worthy to rule over them all and to be loved by each heart.

"But I had no idea then that the Lord was really going to send me to a foreign country. Once, however, I saw with the inward eye a vast land and was told, 'that is Canada where you must go.' Deeply humbled at such a commission, I answered, 'oh my great God, Thou canst all, I can nothing. If it please Thee to be with me I am ready to obey.' From that time on Canada was always in my thoughts.

"While this was going on in my mind God had guided the heart of a Madame de la Petrie to devote her wealth to Mission work in Canada. She had been reading in the letter of a missionary there, Le Jeune, the appeal: 'is there no holy soul anywhere with enough zeal to come out here and not let the life and death of our Lord go to waste any longer but proclaim it to save these poor savages?' While this appeal

was in her thoughts Madame de la Petrie fell so ill that she was given up by the physicians. But her mind was clear and she made a vow that if she recovered she would found a Home and school in Canada. After a refreshing sleep the physician asked in astonishment, 'where is your fever?' She answered with a smile, 'gone to Canada.' "

Now everything began to move forward; the pieces of the puzzle fitted together. Berniers Louvigni (Maria's friend and confessor) had without her knowledge proposed her to Madame de la Petrie as the instrument for carrying out their missionary purpose. Being inwardly already prepared Maria at once accepted the call, and preparations to send out a little company of sisters under her charge were set in hand.

"For three days before we sailed God so possessed my mind that I could neither sleep nor eat. The thought of what I was to meet in Canada filled all my mind. I saw suffering without end; I saw that I should be painfully forsaken by God and by creatures; that I should have to enter a hidden and unknown life. It was as if God said to me 'yes, go; you must serve Me now at your own charges.' But though this frightened me I was still firmly resolved to do and to suffer whatever God willed.

"When we arrived at Dieppe where we were to embark I prostrated myself before God and offered myself as a burnt sacrifice. The Holy Spirit took possession of my soul and filled me with all grace and strength needed for our enterprise. I cannot describe what I experienced in this hour of utter surrender.

"Meanwhile we reached the coast, where we found ourselves surrounded by crowds of spectators. I did naturally and easily all the things that had to be done and seen to, while all the time my spirit was absorbed in intercourse with God.

"At last the moment came when we had to say good-bye to our friend and guardian angel M. Berniers. How hard was this parting. He had shown us much fatherly love and

kindness, helping in all our preparations and making all arrangements for us, proving himself in all things a man full of the Holy Spirit.

"When I put my foot in the boat taking us to the ship I might have trod paradise; was it not the first step in a journey undertaken for the love of God? My heart was singing to God while the anchor was lifted and the sails hoisted; the wind filled them and we drew away from France, knowing we should never see our country again. Our lives were now dedicated to the service of ignorant Indians.

"Many dangers threatened us on the voyage, and many opportunities occurred to surrender our wills to God's. Once a huge iceberg drove straight towards us with such speed that a collision seemed inevitable. It looked as large as a fortified town and had summits like towers. All on board shouted, 'God have mercy on us, we are lost!' But a great calm possessed my spirit; I felt no fear, only a readiness to sacrifice even the joy of seeing our Indians to the will of God. Madame de la Petrie kept close to me that we might die together. I held my dress together so that when the ship was wrecked I might be decently covered.

"Suddenly the helmsman without knowing what he did turned the wheel in a direction contrary to the course ordered. The movement saved the ship. The great berg, only a spear's length away, passed by on our side, doing us no harm. All were amazed and thanked God.

"After this and other dangers we at last reached port, where to our joy we found many Indians. They too were pleased to see us; when we told them we had left our country and our relations in order to teach their daughters they were astonished; to discover the outcome they came with us to Quebec, many miles inland. There the inhabitants celebrated our arrival; we were so full of joy that we kissed the soil of our new country. Next day we were taken to an Indian village, our brothers now. How good it was to meet

some converts and hear them sing the praises of God in their own tongue. One of them immediately gave his daughter into our charge, and several more followed within the next few days. We were given a hut with two small rooms for our temporary accommodation till a convent could be built. We felt we were better housed than in a king's palace, for now we had our treasures, our new converts, actually with us.

"The little hut was soon changed into a hospital, small-pox broke out among the children and several of them died. The place was not yet properly furnished; beds were made on the floor; there were so many we had to climb over them. God gave the sisters such zeal that the disease and dirt of the little patients never repelled them.

"We had now to learn their language. As I had had no practice in studying for twenty years it seemed impossible to me to learn their barbaric tongue. I asked God very earnestly about this. He so blessed my efforts that I soon understood people and could talk with them.

"Great crowds of Indians came to us, both men and women, and I taught them Christian truths. They are certainly very dirty and have an evil smell, partly because they eat dried meat, and partly because they wear no linen." (Oh nice French ways, only recently learned, of wearing underclothes!) "In the cooking" (where presumably Indians helped) "we sometimes found a shoe in the pot; hairs, and bits of coal, etc., every day. But the Lord always kept alive in us the sense that they were His, bought by His blood, so that we could serve them not only without any disgust, but with eagerness. People who came to see us used to wonder that we kissed and embraced the little orphans given to us, as they were covered with filthy rags and their bodies smeared all over with rancid oil. As soon as they felt a little at home with us we tried to cleanse them from grease and from vermin, and gave them clean underclothes.

"We lived nearly three years in this hut; and in spite of many discomforts were always consoled and cheered in our spirits.

"About my inward life, I must relate that all I had been told about serving God at my own charges came true. I had the experience of being deprived of all grace from God and of all trust in human beings; the very best of them I could bear least; also God permitted them to feel a great aversion towards me; this they told me themselves afterwards. Deeply ashamed of myself, I admired the love and kindness of the sisters with which they bore with and obeyed me. I hardly dared to look at them and performed the lowest services myself, deeming myself unworthy of the higher ones. I don't think any of them guessed my misery, as I fulfilled the duties of my office as usual, though I felt they must see my low state as I could see nothing else myself.

"Sometimes my darkness was lightened by a ray of light, so filling me with joy and love that after the previous wretchedness it seemed paradise; but these gleams of sunshine through heavy clouds only lasted a short while, and the abyss of darkness I was plunged in again afterwards was so full of mortal sorrow and bitterness that it seemed very hell, and brought me to the edge of despair. Oh who can describe the ways by which God leads a soul He has called to become pure enough to behold Him! It cannot be told with what sharp accuracy and penetration and with what relentless strictness the Divine love deals with our human nature, even after one has thought it to be already conquered and annihilated. This nature of ours has so many secret lairs and crooked paths to hide in that no one can discover and destroy them save the Spirit of God and His consuming fire.

"After three years the worst soul anguish left me, but a certain rebelliousness of my affections remained. There was a bitterness, an aversion against my neighbour if I was contradicted, which became almost a habit; though the Lord

helped me never to say an offensive word even to the person I disliked most. I saw myself so destitute of virtue that I became intolerable to myself and found practising patience in putting up with myself the hardest discipline of all."

Reading of the experiences of this missionary community (the biographer does not state their number), crowded together for some years in the narrowest of quarters with their charges, one cannot but extend to them retrospective sympathy for such trials to poor human nerves. To any modern replica in the Mission field it may be of interest to learn the rules Maria Guyard made for herself in dealing with people of greatly differing temperaments and culture.

1. Never excuse yourself, even when unjustly accused; nor accuse the real culprit unless obedience demands it.
2. Watch your own heart; do not complain or exaggerate when it seems to you (or is really the case) that you are insulted or slandered or humiliated in any way.
3. Never praise yourself; do not detract from the praise of another when you hear it, or it becomes your duty to say good of him.
4. Do not envy others their inward or outward gifts. If another is pleased, do not envy his pleasure but share it.
5. Show special courtesy and kindness to anyone you naturally dislike. Find excuses for them, and judge their motives by the rule of charity.
6. Do not be tender towards yourself; nor consider too long when required to do something troublesome.
7. Don't harbour mistrust or suspicion against anyone because of small seemings.

Perhaps only those who have lived in similar circumstances of isolation, of limitations in companionship, yet compulsory propinquity, amid the ceaseless strain of readjustment to the demands of a different race, can fully appreciate the wisdom of such rules. "The real problem of the mission field," someone has said, "are the missionaries." So Maria

Guyard found it; in herself to begin with, and so she solved it.

A convent was built in due course where all were comfortably housed. But one winter day through the carelessness of a lay sister fire broke out and burnt the place down. "I could do nothing save throw the papers of the convent out of the window; my property I left to the flames; only a mattress I snatched for a sick person, and the moments taken for this saved my life; for they prevented my running upstairs again to the office whence my retreat would have been cut off; the instant I left the room which was under the bell tower the bell crashed down, the flames raged after it just behind me. As I saw that nothing could be done, I bowed before the Lord as a token of acceptance.

"Our whole community stood at a little distance in the snow, meek and silent, as if nothing were happening. They were praying. A man said to them, 'either you must be fools, or else full of the love of God that you can remain so unmoved while all your possessions are burning.' The good man did not know the strength Jesus was sending into our hearts. For myself I can say I never felt a greater joy than on this occasion. My mind was quite undisturbed by any sadness or distress, I felt extraordinarily happy and kept on saying to the Lord, 'it is Thy doing! We praise Thee for all Thy ways!' My soul was at peace in that His will was being done, His will that we stood there with nothing, His will that I who had carried through the building with many troubles and under great contradictions against myself, and had brought it to its present state, now saw it perish."

What happened then and how they fared afterwards we are not told; her autobiography goes no farther; but from letters to her son we learn something of her last eighteen years.

In her inner life she reached great heights and unassailable peace.

"There will always be changes, till God has wholly

cleansed through His fires the soul He has chosen to dwell in and possesses it in its innermost depths where no disquiet, or effort, or desire is found, only unchanging peace. It would be deceiving oneself to say one could no longer sin; but one enjoys the glorious liberty of the children of God in unspeakable bliss and rest. Neither the confusions of business, nor the persecution of men, nor the temptations of Satan, nor the distractions of any creatures, nor illness and suffering and anguish, nothing can disturb or reach this innermost which is the dwelling of God; though perhaps wilful sin could.

"Souls progressed so far have reached their goal, for they enjoy in their ground Him whom they love. What else they experience is the exceeding greatness of His love and generosity; in themselves they are content and will only His adorable Will.

"When entangled in temporal works they need not think long and laboriously; their inner guide instructs them immediately what to say or do. This is now the condition into which the divine kindness has been pleased to bring me.

"I have only to add that, being much weakened by severe illnesses which lasted for two years during which I fulfilled the duties of my office very badly, I desired to retire. I cannot recover; I suffer much pain, I am very familiar now with suffering. During the illnesses there came such attacks of agony that I nearly cried out aloud. Besides other troubles—stone, inflammation of the kidneys—I had an abscess in the head causing violent pain and making me deaf in one ear; this was very trying, as I have so much to do not only with the sisters, but with people outside. The abscess broke at last.

"In short, I am in constant suffering and pain to which I am now quite accustomed. Medicines do not help me, neither can I die, but I wanted to hide my sufferings. I used to be very strong; I am told that too great labours and trials

have ruined my health. But I say it is the Love of God which sent me these sicknesses as an earnest of His remembrance of me and I thank Him for them with my whole heart.

"I did think that in this state I should be allowed to rest; but God let the burden of office fall on me again. Doctors advise my remaining in bed and resting; but every day I am the first to get up and the last to retire, and only seldom get any rest. I obey all the rules of the house. All the correspondence is in my hands, I see to our reports to France, and to all our business affairs here in Canada, and fulfil whatever other duties fall to my office.

"Greatly do I desire to be useful to God's dear children, the Indians; not only now, but after my death; so I seek to train the sisters for this. During the winter every morning was employed in teaching them the language of the Hurons and Algonquins. Yet when we have done all that is possible we have to think of ourselves as unprofitable servants, especially I who am only a grain of sand in the foundation of this new church.

"All the time, in the ground of my being, I am as it were lost in God by a union, an intercourse, an intimacy which I find no words to describe."

From reports published by the son (sent him by the convent?) we learn that in January 1672 another very painful illness attacked his mother. Her patience and cheerfulness edified all who saw her; the happiness of her face witnessed to the high joy of her spirit, which was rejoicing to see nature conquered and crucified with Christ; in her suffering she often repeated, "I am crucified with Christ."

All the sisters prayed for her recovery; her confessor urged her to join in this request to preserve her for the community to whom she was so necessary. She prayed, "Lord, if Thou seest my people still need me, I will not shrink from further work and suffering—let Thy will be done."

She did get better, hobbling about the house on two sticks, but only till Good Friday. Then such agonizing pains started in her side that the surgeon operated on her, cutting down to the very bone. She held herself as still and quiet as if she had not been in the body at all. Only when the surgeon (in those days of no anaesthetics!) cleansed the wound with his iron instruments and cauterized it with acids she moved a little under the torture, but immediately exclaimed "my God, how impatient I am."

When told she could not recover she became exceedingly cheerful and happy; remaining inwardly collected, so as to die, she hoped, in conscious union with her Saviour. She spoke little, answered only briefly when asked anything, "but with angelic kindness." The little Indian children she sent for repeatedly, blessed them with motherly tenderness and showed she had them in her heart.

On the last day of April 1627, in the seventy-third year of her life, she went home. The expression of joy on her face when she passed remained after her death; an exalted beauty of spirit seemed still to irradiate the body, as if the transfigured soul had left on its former house a ray of eternal glory.

VI

CATHERINE OF GENOA

WE find it easy to understand that saints should spring from peasant parents and quiet country surroundings like Armelle's, or the mountain farm of Nicholas von der Flue, or pious homes like Marina of Escobar's; but the corrupt courts of royalty in the Middle Ages seem a less likely breeding ground. "Yet thou hast a few names, even in Sardis" remains a truth repeated in the history of the Christian Church.

Catherine was a daughter of the Viceroy of Naples and was born in 1446 or 1447. What the influences surrounding her must have been we may guess from the later story of her youth, though as a small child her inclinations were all towards God and goodness; from her eighth year, she tells us, she began practices of prayer and self-denial. Presumably a young girl in high circles was kept in safe seclusion in those days, and nothing prevented her from following in private her pious desires.

But in her sixteenth year her parents married her to a young nobleman from Genoa, Julian Adorno. He turned out to be a dissolute worldling, bent on pleasure and vice and wasting his goods in riotous living. Not only his goods, but hers; it is stated that she was brought to poverty through him. What this sudden transition from a girl's retired and pious life into a whirl of worldliness and worse must have meant to the young wife we may imagine. Her disillusionment must have been bitter.

Her mind became filled with deep sadness; her loneliness was almost unendurable. For five years she struggled to keep alive her early faith and practice of prayer and to ward off the melancholy besetting her; but there was none to encourage or sympathize with her aspirations and the fight

became too unequal. She felt she must escape somehow the perpetual sense of strife in her daily life. As there was no way of changing her worldly surroundings it had to be the struggle of the spirit that must be relinquished. She surrendered to the world and its lusts; the inner life went under.

She herself relates that her soul now consented to all demands of the body; that these demands increased daily; that self-love represented them as so reasonable and necessary that not one of them might remain unsatisfied. If at times the spirit still demurred and would not see greed and desire satisfied every time the flesh grumbled and complained that it was being defrauded. She felt plunged into an ocean of love for earthly things and could think of nothing save what self-love and the senses dictated. The enslaved soul lost its light in acknowledging the body as its master; to ease any possible qualms seemingly pious reflections arose that the beauties and joys of earth were means to get to know the heavenly ones; if these were so good, how excellent must be those! Alas, in fact, the heavenly joys came no nearer, rather receded farther away; for as she let herself be possessed more and more by material desires she lost the impress of the spiritual day by day and at last became unwilling even to hear or speak of divine things for fear of being disturbed in enjoyment. In the end nothing remained of good save a little gnawing of the conscience which, however, could be disregarded. Only the thought of death caused occasional qualms and terrors, but only for the moment, presently all felt secure again.

But as time went on Catherine found that however hard she tried she could never satisfy her desires completely. For the thirst of the soul (she declared later) is for infinite joys, and can never be stilled by any finite ones; the more satisfaction is sought in these alone the less it is found; for in seeking them the soul gets farther and farther from her true centre of rest—God.

Still blind, however, Catherine went on exploiting earth. If one desire did not yield satisfaction but only satiety and discontent, she turned to another. She tried one thing after another, lost time, deceived herself, and never found what she sought. Truly, remarks the biographer, if satisfaction could be found in things of earth, very few would be saved! But at length she had run herself weary in this course. The old sadness—to escape which she had entered on it—invaded her mind again. She had now been married for ten years. No outward details are supplied to us; we only know she was living with her husband who throughout kept on in his old ways, probably by this time they were in rather straitened circumstances, at least as compared with her former affluence. But much worse was the inner poverty. She felt the things to which she had trusted for happiness had deceived her. She became conscious of an inner corruptness and emptiness, and of a loneliness which frightened her. In her distress she began to shun worldly society, but found she could not bear her own. “I have no more joy in anything on earth,” she lamented, “and the way to heaven is blocked and hidden! I am detestable in the eyes of God, of men, of myself, for letting myself be drawn away by love of self. When I see myself so earthly-minded I despair with shame. I satisfied the lusts of the body, first under the appearance of necessity, then for needless indulgence, then I let myself be taken prisoner by them. I became blind and coarse; I used to be spiritual, but now am wholly earthly. Miserable creature that I am! I cannot lift myself above earth, it pulls me back to evil. I am like a wanderer lost and straying in a far country, with no guides but nature and self-love, they make me do what they please, I am so united to them that I will what they will. I am blind and corrupt, bound, burdened, dead, dark, with no light, no feelings for good things. Earth has me in its clutches. A little inner disquiet is all I still have; but, because it gnaws and troubles I seek to free myself from it by distrac-

tions. So I become more and more a slave, and my discontent increases the farther I go."

Not a ray of relief came. Darkness held her fast. Despairing of any chance of finding help or of being able to return to God, she threw herself into pleasure and worldliness afresh and even boasted of it. There seemed nothing left but defiance of goodness and of God, any right to whose help she believed herself to have forfeited.

But the Love of God is wider than the measure of man's mind. The sheep lost in the wilderness was not as forsaken as she thought herself to be. A conviction began to seize upon her mind that on the path she had chosen things would keep on getting worse. At the same time she was filled with a sense of utter helplessness. The strength of the snares holding her was such that none but God could free her. Then a fresh terror confronted her; the thought of death, not only of the body, but of the soul, filled her with agonizing fear. In vain she looked around for aid; she saw herself surrounded by enemies to whom she had willingly surrendered herself to be slaughtered; horrified at her state she cried out, "oh cursed and forsaken creature that I am! Who will lift me out of this abyss of evil if not Thou, oh Lord God? Send me light that I may find my way out of this pit of shame!"

She now made a resolve that she would look to God and keep on imploring His help. Whatever may happen to me now, she declared, I will take straight from the hand of God.

It needs but that in the heart of man for Heaven to respond and to enter the channels timidly opened by the human will.

The next step appeared to her to be confession, and obediently she went to lay open her sinful life to a spiritual director. But no sooner had she knelt down in the confessional than such a flood of the love of God was poured out in her heart, and at the same time such a vision of her own

depravity that she sank almost fainting on the ground and exclaimed aloud, "no more world! no more sin!" Her heart was so filled with love that it was impossible to her to talk about her sins, she had to leave the confessional and hurry home. In her locked room, in broken words, she responded to the overwhelming experience of the Mercy and Love of God. "Love, Love!" she cried, "how is it possible for Thee to call me with such kindness? To make me know in one moment what I can never utter?"

The days that followed were filled with an almost crushing sense of contrition. With sighs and laments, her heart torn, she bewailed her past; her ceaseless cry was, "oh Love! Love! never, never more to sin!"

"It was not punishment," she related later, "which made sin so hateful to me, but being suddenly made to know the exceeding kindness of God. My soul was wounded, as by a fire of love. Myself I held in so little esteem that I would willingly have confessed my sins to the whole town. The divine Love discovered to me my whole disorderly conduct, and the dangers into which I had been walking blindfold. I was so horrified to see where my steps were leading that I nearly lost my senses. How can I ever appear before God covered with mire as I am?"

For fourteen months she was kept in the valley of contrition. Though in that first flash of the divine light in her soul she had been assured of forgiveness, yet the memory of her sins took her through a long school of penitence. To have been for years an enemy of God, a lover of the flesh, caused her such oppression that she lost not only all rapture but any sort of peace. "I go about sighing, unbearable to myself. My robe is stained, stained; what shall I do? My sighs, my cries, are not accepted; my penance and contrition is vain; I have no joy in anything; I can neither eat, nor talk, nor sleep, I would like to hide from all men."

In this despairing state of grief over the past she could

not find even the relief of tears; she sighed in secret and felt her life being consumed away.

Like all the saints, and like less exalted followers of Christ, she had to learn "the dark night of the soul."

But the divine Love again came to her rescue. She had a vision of the Lord's suffering which inflamed her heart afresh. "I have no more heart," she exclaimed worshippingly, "no more soul. My heart and my soul are for ever the heart and soul of my divine Love. No longer I—Christ lives in me."

Such a burning, glowing ray of Love then penetrated her inmost being that from all other loves and desires she knew herself to be henceforth completely loosened. She was convinced that if God should withdraw His hand from her she would be as wicked as Satan, but all fear was cast out by seeing herself safely held in the hand of Love.

Whatever she thought was required of her she did faithfully. For the first four years after her conversion she kept nature in the strictest subjection. What it demanded she refused; what it disliked she forced on it. She had, for instance, a great natural taste for talk and conversation. Now, when relations or friends visited her she reduced her words to the barest necessity of courtesy, untroubled by what others would think of her silence. When going out she looked at passers-by as little as possible, keeping her thoughts on God. These habits gave to others an impression of melancholy; yet she declares she was always rejoicing. As regards food and time for sleep, she denied herself all softness. Six hours a day she devoted to prayer. Her inner life was often so overwhelmingly strong that she could only speak in a low and scarcely audible voice. At times she seemed to be dead to all outward life. Yet she was submissive to others and took another's wish in preference to her own when she perceived it. During Lent she took no food. For twenty-three years, we are told, God granted her this grace of fasting completely

during those weeks. At first she was herself disconcerted by this capacity and feared she was deceiving herself; she tried to force herself to eat but could not keep down a morsel. When others wondered or grumbled at this she was distressed, being unable to explain the inner union of love which sustained her. Once she did try to say plainly that this fasting was one of God's outward gifts which came to her apart from her own volition, but that the inner workings of God are of far greater importance than the outward.

She used to ask the Lord to withhold His gifts. When the Love of God seized upon her spirit so powerfully that she had to hide herself because her senses seemed to leave her, she resisted and said to God, "I do not desire Thy gifts, only Thyself." But the more she resisted such deep fervours the more the Lord poured them into her.

This burning love which at times bereft her literally of her senses so that she seemed to have no connection with ordinary life, at other times drove her to serve her neighbour. From the beginning of her surrendered life she sought out the poor. As she was no longer wealthy herself she collected money and other necessities for them; but the nursing, cleansing, dressing of the sick she did with her own hands. There were no doubt terrible slums in Genoa in those days. Catherine must have found her sick sometimes in conditions making recovery doubtful if not impossible. Then she carried them into her own dwelling, or into the hospital if there was room. No call to a sick person was ever refused, however repulsive or dangerous the illness. When a message came she left whatever she was doing and hurried to help, without asking whether the patient were rich or poor, friend or enemy, a stranger or a relation.

The city began to know her as succourer of the sick. The hospital authorities may have thought the services of such a willing philanthropist could be turned to good account in their institution. An invitation was issued to Catherine to

live with her husband in the hospital and there minister to the sick. Joyfully she obeyed the call. We are not told what the husband thought. Perhaps, having run through all his money, he had no choice. That he continued to lead a dissolute life is clear from a mention of him in her story later on. Meanwhile a small chamber was assigned to them in the hospital as their home, and within its walls Catherine remained the humble and obedient wife she had been throughout her married life. Its trials continued for her for many years yet.

In the hospital she was treated at first as the veriest servant. Her zeal and her willingness were made use of, but she herself hardly esteemed. The biographer states she was despised by others and often harshly treated. One wonders if she was ever tempted to rebel and to throw up her thankless job? All we are told is that she conscientiously carried out every order given to her, rejoicing to be the "servant of all men."

Her loyalty and faithfulness in service did not fail to have its effect. After some years of being in the lowliest position she was chosen to be the head of the whole institution.

Her spiritual muscles had now to adjust themselves to entirely different exercises. The responsibility for the whole place rested upon her; the conditions of her life must have resembled those of our own; pressure, interruptions, complaints, difficult tempers to deal with, material needs to supply, civic duties to fulfil. We do not know how hospitals were organized in those days; they can hardly have had our modern orderly ways; the greater must have been the burden on those in authority. And perhaps the greater, too, the temptation to be absorbed by the multiplicity of claims in the outward life; to let the consciousness be invaded and ruled over by the innumerable things to *do*; to let it become the Martha-mind—so characteristic of ourselves, so eminently justifiable in our eyes.

Of Catherine her biographer states that she fulfilled all

her duties in the hospital from morning till night, without losing the sense of the presence of her Divine Love. Those around her could not fail to be aware of her complete absorption in the Love of God; but they also saw with astonishment that she neglected nothing outward. Further, they noticed that material things went well; for instance, all the needs of the hospital were supplied. Catherine herself kept all the accounts, and that so accurately that no mistake was ever found. For her own services she accepted nothing, saying that the little that remained to her of her property sufficed for her simple way of life.

Until her fiftieth year she bore the daily burden of responsibility for a great institution, as well as ceaseless domestic trial. The arrangement of living together in a small room in the hospital must have come to an end some time; at least there is a mention of her having to look not only after the hospital but her own house. Repeatedly it is stated that as long as her husband lived she was to him an obedient wife, bearing without complaint the suffering inflicted on her by his licentious conduct and unkindness. In the end he fell into a long and painful illness which he bore with the greatest impatience and rebellion, deepening into despair. His wife was deeply concerned for his soul; she saw him nearing death quite unfit to meet it. One day she locked herself into her room and prayed for him with many tears, asking the divine Love to give her his soul. After half an hour of earnest asking an assurance came to her that her prayer was granted. She returned to the sick-chamber where she found the patient quite changed; instead of the usual angry and despairing complaints calm resignation to the Will of God now ruled in his heart.

After his death everyone congratulated her on being freed from the misery he had caused her; he had evidently been so notorious a sinner that her martyrdom as a wife was public knowledge. She checked such congratulation, saying

she had no such sense of relief, "my one cause of rejoicing is to please God. Whatever happens to me, good or bad, pleasing God is all I care for." Others similarly afflicted turned to her for help. A wife whose sick husband was in despair because of the pain he had to endure, implored her to visit him. She went at once, "for she was," says the biographer, "so pitiful and ready to serve that had an ant called out to her for help she would instantly have responded." After comforting the sick man with loving and holy words she returned, praying for him as she walked home. The wife went into the room and found her husband "changed from a devil to an angel." "Tell me," he asked her, "who was that saint you brought in?" She answered "it was Catherine Adorna, a woman living in a holy way." When Catherine visited him again he told her with tears that after she left him the Saviour had forgiven him all his sins, also told him to prepare for death as his life was nearly over.

When Catherine had reached the age of fifty her many labours and the fire of love burning ceaselessly within her had so weakened her body that occupation with temporal things became burdensome to her. Yet she continued, and help came. She tells us that as soon as one business was finished all thought of it was banished from her consciousness. But if she had to attend to it again it was brought back. God never let her forget or neglect anything, so that none should be offended. She herself rested in nothing, either temporal or spiritual—in all things it was God Himself whom she sought and to whom she offered her intentions. The fervour of love was often so great that to moderate it she performed some lowly personal services for the sick, or sought distraction in some hospital business. But the more she fled from inward consolation the more they were poured into her, so that at times she had to go apart and hide herself from all. Others testify that it was impossible to look on her without being made aware of God, her face was that of a

seraph. Those who came to see her found it hard to tear themselves away. To countless persons who asked for help she gave of the treasure house of her knowledge. Thus, she told someone:

"If someone complains to me of his bad mind and inclination to evil, and that the more he deplores his faults the more he falls into them, I answer: 'you have faults and deplore them; and so have I faults, but I don't deplore them; you do wrong, and weep for it, so should I if God did not hold me back. You cannot keep yourself; as little as I can. We have to forsake ourselves, and trust ourselves, our affairs—our spiritual affairs too—to Him who alone is able to keep us from evil. Then He will do what we cannot do. Whoso is caught by God, bound by Him, held by Him, must put his head under the yoke and may no more open his mouth.'"

The love of God which in early years she had evaded and doubted became in the end her greatest certitude; looking back on her own path of long resistance she saw with spirit-enlightened eyes the ways of God with all men.

"My inner eye sees in God so immeasurable a love towards His creatures that not even the intelligence of an angel could understand one spark of it. God has the deepest sympathy with man. What would His goodness not work in us if we did not hinder Him by sin! He so longs to unite with us that one might almost say He does violence to our liberty by the inner promptings whereby He ceaselessly seeks to draw us to Himself. The nearer you come to God the better you understand this. When I contemplate the care and attention with which He seeks to lift us to Him by every possible means I want to say, the great God has become our Servant. My soul is lost in amazement that He the Absolute, the In-Himself-All-Sufficient, has the care for His creature so continuously at heart.

"Yet man in self-love resists Him ceaselessly. He is so in

love with things visible and sensible that he will not let go one of them unless he sees four others to compensate. God has to promise him greater things than he renounces, has to give him even here a foretaste of eternal life. Even so, man always tries to evade Him. Yet God keeps on knocking at the human heart, wishing to enter it and make it His workshop. There is no man, however low he may have fallen, whom God is not ready to help up, if he will let himself be helped up and will repent of his sins."

A preaching friar once said to her he could love God much better than she could, seeing he had renounced the world and was living in an order, whereas she was married and in the world. He went on giving further lengthy explanations of the causes of his superior sanctity. Catherine listened for a long time, but said at last: "If you could convince me that the robe of your order would increase my love for God by one spark I should tear it from you and put it on. As for the rest, you are welcome to the superior merit of having left the world for a cloistered life. I do not seek it for myself. But that I should be unable to love God as fervently as you can, of that you can never convince me, you may say what you like."

It sounds a little human, for a saint—does it not? Did she feel it so? We are told that on return home she spoke to the Lord in her customary intimate way. "My Love, what could prevent me loving Thee? my circumstances, my calling? Surely, never. If I were among an army of soldiers, they could not keep me from loving Thee. If the world, or a husband, could interfere with the love of God, what a weak love it would be, of how little worth. No, as far as I know it, this love is weakened by nothing, conquered by nothing, rather it conquers all things and is lifted above all."

For twenty-five years she lived daily under the direct guidance and inspiration of God. If, according to the custom of her time, she sought help and advice from a spiritual

director, she was plunged into such interior distress and suffering that she had to desist. Naturally this was misunderstood; she was urged by many that it would be safer and better to submit to counsel and obedience. But the Lord reassured her inwardly, "trust yourself to Me; do not doubt."

So the years went by, till on account of age and increasing weakness she could hardly bear the strength of the divine inflowings. Then a priest was brought to her, a deeply spiritual man to whom God had given light and grace to understand the divine work in Catherine's soul. To him alone she could discover herself; indeed, she felt urged to speak to him with complete frankness and freedom of all her spiritual experiences. It was he who wrote down all she told him. Soon afterwards she lost him again; but this did not trouble her. She continued to live her life hidden in God.

About nine years before her death she fell into a strange illness which no one understood. No medicines were of any use. Her bodily strength declined till she was thought to be dying; then she suddenly recovered again. The painful attacks on body and mind then came on again. It seemed as if the fire of pure love had so filled and inflamed her that her very members became consumed; at such times she could scarcely move. Sometimes a sudden desire for food seized her; but when it was brought she was unable to take it. The poor body was no doubt putting up a fight, but it had little chance.

In her great torture she looked at times like one crucified; yet she remained in such inward peace, and when she could speak again talked with such fervour and power of the divine love that none could listen to her without tears. People came from far off to see one in whose soul was heaven, but purgatory in her body. Sometimes she was entranced; when she returned to consciousness her words about the Love of God were like arrows, penetrating straight into the heart;

"Love of God!" "Kindness of God!" "Purity of God!" or, at other times simply, "Love!" "Union!" "Peace!" Or again, just "God! God!"

A famous physician came and expressed his astonishment to her that so pious a person as she should give offence by pretending her illness had a supernatural cause and could not be cured by medicines. This was nothing but arrogance and hypocrisy.

She humbly replied, "I should be very sorry to give offence to anyone. If you know of a medicine to cure me I am very ready to take it." He prescribed many and various drugs. For twenty days she obediently took what he gave her; but when nothing had the least effect he admitted this sickness was beyond him. He recognized in it the work of a higher Power, and visited her after this for his soul's edification.

Sometimes she was granted rest for a day and a night; then the attacks were renewed, and in increasing violence. The whole body trembled, the right shoulder seemed to separate from it and each rib to tear loose from its fellows. Convulsive movements tortured her throat and mouth, so that she could not speak, or move her eyes, and hardly breathe; but when it passed she said with a smile that no one must be troubled on her account, she was quite happy; only would everyone yield their lives to God, for the way to Him was very narrow.

One agony followed another. It was as if she were being burnt from within. All the time her one prayer was "let nothing separate me from God! Nothing else matters." At times some sparks of the eternal joy lit up her heart and she exclaimed joyfully, "Lord, do with me what Thou will."

Then again pain and the terrible inner heat caused her intolerable thirst, yet she was unable to take a drop of water. One day she had all the windows opened to see the sky; for an hour and a half her eyes looked up at it without moving, her face shone, joy seemed to pour forth from her as she

called out: "let me go! let me go! No more earth, no more earth now!"

Three days later she lay in such a consuming fire that her mouth and tongue seemed like an oven; feet and hands and the whole body were so burning hot that no one could touch her; the pain was so great as to force loud cries from her. On the next day, still in torture, she stretched out her arms as one fastened to a cross and said, "welcome, suffering. It is thirty-six years since Thou, oh Love, hast enlightened me. Since then I have wished to suffer for Thee inwardly and outwardly; so, when it came, I did not feel it to be suffering, only Thy sending, Thy ordaining, and therefore beautiful to me. But now there is such pain that I cannot understand how even the strongest body could endure it and live. If it were of iron it would surely have been destroyed ere now. Still I feel it is Thy will that I should continue yet to suffer. For though nothing can help or relieve me, I am given such strength that I can say, I do not suffer; I am unutterably blessed."

A week later she was able to receive Holy Communion, though she could scarcely breathe. Her heart was filled with such joy that her face reflected it. She seemed to see a ladder of fire on which she was gradually drawn up. The bodily heat was so intense she thought the whole world must be on fire and asked to have the window opened to see the blaze.

Four days later, on September 10th, the powers of darkness were allowed one last assault; she was besieged by impressions and imaginations of sins of which she had never thought, and of which her conscience did not accuse her. The next day she began to pass black clots of blood, and black spots appeared all over her. The pain which had seemed up to the limit of endurance before still mounted higher; the seething black blood pouring from her overheated the very vessels. She still spoke all through that night of September 13th

when the burnt-up life blood was leaving her in such quantities that it seemed she must be completely drained. Asked in the morning whether she would like to receive Holy Communion again she pointed upwards with a smile, as if to indicate she was about to join in the Supper of the Lamb. And in that moment she parted from the body of her martyrdom in great stillness and peace, on September 14, 1510, in the sixty-third or sixty-fourth year of her earthly life.

* * * * *

Can we find any explanation for such prolonged and agonizing suffering? There are those who think that our present physical bodies, instruments as they are for the uses to which we now put them, are by no means evolved enough to be perfect instruments for housing a soul in ceaseless communion with God.

“There is a definite type of ill health which dogs the possessors of great mystical genius, resulting from the enormous strain which they put upon *an organism evolved for very different purposes than that of correspondence with Transcendent Reality*. The psychic pain and instability which accompany growths to new levels have their reverberations in the bodily frame. The radiant efficiency and perfect co-ordination of soul and body we see in Jesus of Nazareth are seldom repeated in the inheritors of His life; and the making of successive stages of that new creation is a matter of turmoil and stress.”¹

“One law,” says Chandler,² “seems fairly clear; namely that bodily suffering is a condition of the highest exaltation of the spirit. . . . The powers, mental and physical, of our organizations have come to be . . . so exclusively directed to the external visible world that they are out of practice with spiritual work and suffer pain and discomfort in attempting

¹ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, p. 174.

² *Faith and Experience*, quoted by E. Underhill.

to perform it. The organism that can respond at all readily to spiritual forces will be an "abnormal" one; nerves and fibres which heredity has made slack, will throb with pain when they are, in these abnormal cases, brought into tune with heavenly melodies; and again the abnormality and tension and pain will increase as they are used in this un-earthly music."

Are then such as Catherine the true benefactors of mankind by breaking, at tremendous personal cost, a way through the thickets of physical and mental efficiency and spiritual inefficiency now hemming in our race?

And are there lonely and steep paths of high adventure still awaiting courageous spiritual pioneers who, at whatever cost to themselves, will climb them and attain holiness and knowledge of God, and thus help to infuse into the slowly evolving human physical body the elements needed to enable it to endure its true and ultimate function of being a Temple of the living God?

VII

HEINRICH SUSO

Suso's father belonged to the noble family of the Vom Berg in the district of Hegau in South Germany. He was a thorough worldling and bitterly opposed to the piety and God-fearing ways of his wife. She was a commoner, of the plain name Säus which her son Heinrich afterwards took in preference to the aristocratic name of his father (latinized later into Suso). His mother suffered much from her husband's persecution and violence; but she steadily grew in grace and love to God throughout her troubled life. Her health suffered through her fervours and the practice of austerities; one Sunday in Lent she fainted in church from exhaustion, was carried home and lay peacefully and quietly on her bed until Good Friday when she passed away from this earthly sphere.

The exact year of her son's birth is not known; it took place either at the end of the thirteenth or the very beginning of the fourteenth century. He died in 1365. Of his childhood and youth nothing is known; save that he must have been educated in the Dominican monastery at Constance, for his biographer mentions that his conversion began in his eighteenth year, "after he had already worn the robe of the order for five years." This Dominican order was a preaching one; the great intellectual gifts of the lad were no doubt observed by his tutors; he was sent to the University of Cologne, where he studied and was about to become doctor of divinity. Whether he actually did so is not stated, his own indifference to titles of honour is mentioned; he thought they would not bring him nearer God, nor deepen his knowledge of Him, also that he might show men the way to God without them. Did he voluntarily refrain

from obtaining the title? He came to be a preacher of great fame whose work was greatly blessed. But a long and trying history had to be lived through first.

In the beginning of his religious life he believed himself to be converted and spiritual because he felt sure that if he abstained from those gross sins which rob a man of honour or his good name he would not trespass too far in more ordinary misdeeds. Yet when attempting to satisfy natural desires an inner discomfort filled him; he saw that visible things and their enjoyments would never bring him lasting peace. For as often as he tried to find satisfaction in these he heard the words in his heart: "*this is not what you are seeking.*"

For long he felt the secret pressure of the grace of God without grasping its significance. At length, however, it became so strong that he suddenly, to the astonishment of others, "broke through all fetters and turned entirely to God."

Not without fights with himself and the tempter of souls. He felt urged not to go too far; not to renounce all things; in some things, anyway, to conform to the world and not get out of touch with it entirely. Also doubts arose whether it would not be wise to consider the matter a little longer; it was a course easy to begin but very hard to finish; certainly God was powerful enough to help him, but the point was, was it His will? It would be foolish to hurry the decision; better begin in a small way so as to be able to carry it through; certainly be as devoted as possible, but also careful not to incur opprobrium—and more of the same kind familiar to us all.

But Suso courageously tore himself away; especially from the distractions of social intercourse and frivolous parties, a hard matter to his sociable and lively nature. At first he still went to them for recreation; but "meeting mostly mockery and jeering words returned in sadness and with a sense of spiritual loss, and said to God with many sighs, 'oh my

kind Lord! there is no salvation for me in this social intercourse; I have to give it up.' ”

We would dearly like to know what conversion really meant to him and in what ways exactly he tore himself loose from the world which was apparently still very accessible in the monastery; something drastic and therefore offensive to others it must have been; else why did he “meet with jeers and mockery” when he met other people? Perhaps we may infer some of the denials of self he resolved on from one that the biographer refers to later on, his silence at table. It is said that in thirty years he spoke only once at meals.

We of the twentieth century would prefer our saints a little more sociable and cheerful; and are doubtless right in this, seeing the example of the Lord Himself. Yet it is well to remember what strength of soul, what crucifixion of self, must have been exercised to go against what was customary and considered right by the people in his daily surroundings. That he found it hard we learn from his confessions that when others were laughing and gibing at him as he sat among them in silence, tears were often running down his cheeks, and he bitterly complained to the Lord that he who had always been kind and pitiful not only to foes as well as to friends but even to animals, should receive such treatment. Though pouring out his heart before God relieved him somewhat, he received this answer: “Your childish behaviour comes from your not remembering the words and the example of your Saviour. You must know that God is not contented with your kind heart alone; nor even with your bearing harsh treatment patiently; you have to learn so to die to yourself that you will never rest till the rebellion and disquiet in your heart have been calmed to thoughts of love and to humility in behaviour.”

In those days he longed for an experienced friend to whom he might unburden himself, but found none. Help came in another way.

He heard read at table (how he must have blessed the times when such reading was the rule!) the apocryphal books of the Wisdom of Solomon and of Sirach, representing the eternal wisdom of God as a tender and loving friend desiring to draw the hearts of all men into intimacy with it. Suso had a deeply affectionate nature; the thought of such a friend pleased him greatly; "I will try," he said, "whether this friend of whom such great things are said, will not deign to accept me as a pupil and friend." But immediately he resolved on this conflicting thoughts arose. "Are you going to love something you have never seen," they argued, "and have for a friend a mystery you know nothing about?" On the other hand, the divine Spirit represented to him Wisdom as a most beautiful Image. The conflict continued; now he surrendered his heart to Wisdom, now he was drawn away to love earthly things; wherever he turned there was always something contradicting the desires of his heart; until he finally chose Wisdom as his one and only friend and vowed himself to that service alone.

Then his soul became filled with fervent love to the Eternal Wisdom; he meditated on the fact of Wisdom coming from heaven and becoming incarnate for love of men; he found it was Wisdom which had drawn him upwards since childhood and loosened him from earthly ties. It now became his most important business to exercise himself in practising intercourse with Wisdom—that is, Christ Himself—and to learn to enjoy His presence and nearness by intimate heart talks with Him.

Many of these *Talks with Eternal Wisdom and Truth* he left behind him in writing. He used to read the Bible and other helpful books in the presence of the Eternal Wisdom and then discussed what he read with his Friend. From this practice, he says, much illumination of truth came to him. For instance, at first he could gain nothing from contemplating the Passion; he tried often, but his efforts were vain.

He complained to the Lord of his dullness and incapacity. After a while the story of the Passion became to him a source of light and of grace. His whole soul became occupied with the suffering of the Lord; his spirit drew such strength and joy from it that he, too, would now know none but Christ, and Him crucified, and would now not only believe in Him but be ready to suffer for Him.

In these *Talks* Suso represents himself as a pupil of the Eternal Wisdom. In the beginning of his Christian life the pupil sought only for exalted views of the divinity of Christ and for pleasant feelings and emotions in himself, but later he found the Son of God reading out to him the hard lesson of His lowly humanity, calling on him to follow Him in His suffering.

“My suffering is the door through which all must go who are to attain that which you are seeking. Do not be timid, I will clothe you in My armour; for you are to follow Me in the path of suffering. You will need heroic courage; your heart will often die within you; in many a pain you will sweat blood till your nature is conquered and I have you where I want you. Your own will must be nailed to the cross; from all clinging to creatures—in so far as they hinder salvation—you must become as free as a dying man on his way from this world is loosened from it.

“Be not alarmed at the idea of suffering. None have cause to complain for whom God eases the pain by His own presence. No one enjoys a truer happiness than those who suffer with Me. Whoso has such a good Companion as Myself will win through easily. Suffer wrong willingly, take pleasure in being blamed, and thus mortify your desires. That is the first lesson in the School of Wisdom, which indeed may be read in the open book of My crucified body.

“Return into yourself and forget yourself and all things. I am always near to souls that are Mine and dwell with them in a close and incomprehensible union, wherever they may

walk or stand, or eat or sleep. And in Me can be found all that a heart may desire or a soul long for. Whoso enjoys only one drop of the good I can give will turn from all pleasures, honours and possessions this world can offer as things that have no savour for him now, and which he can no longer enjoy or esteem or desire."

The pupil seized upon these instructions with deep fervour. "Heavenly Father, to us sinners Thou hast given Thy Son! He is mine—He is ours! With both arms I receive Him, with my whole heart and soul I embrace Him, nothing in life or in death shall separate me from Him. It would be easier to me to die than to grieve Him ever again. No pain, no suffering, not hell itself, could hurt me as does my ever having offended and opposed Him who is the joy and bliss of my heart. Lord, I pray Thee to kill me in Thy love if ever I should in any way depart from Thee."

One way of keeping himself in the way of holiness was by denying his body necessary care and comfort. From his eighteenth year until his fortieth he sought in all possible ways to deaden it and make it subject to the spirit. This was entirely in accordance with the notions of his age which had not found out, as we have, that to be a good servant the body must not meet with only beatings and scraps and general contempt. Suso's health suffered from his unrelenting strictness; but he heard at last the voice of the Eternal Wisdom reproving him and ordering him to desist. Indeed, afterwards he advised people against imitating him in this particular; and exhorted them, instead, while keeping fleshly desires in check to take care of their body. When they retorted by asking, why then had he gone so far himself? he replied: God works in His saints strangely and wonderfully, and will be glorified by us in different ways. We have not all the same nature; what is profitable for one may harm another. It is certain that without some strictness with ourselves we shall not reach the goal. But let not the man using austerities judge him who does

not; nor the man who thinks he can do without them judge him who holds them to be profitable. Let every man look to himself, and be sure of what God is asking from him, and leave the rest alone."

It is recorded that he pricked the name of Jesus with a sharp-pointed instrument on his breast, praying while he did it: "Saviour, thou only Love of my heart and soul, see my desire and longing for Thee. I cannot impress Thee into myself as I would; complete what I cannot; press Thyself into the ground of my being; engrave Thy name so deeply within me that it can never more be wiped out, nor I parted from Thee."

When he had shaved, or put on a new habit, or cap, he stood deliberately before the Lord Jesus as in a service of dedication, consecrated everything to Him and asked for His blessing on all.

On his way to meals he never omitted an invitation to the divine Friend to accompany him and grant him His presence with the bodily food. When seated at table he continued to regard Him as if with the inner eye he saw Him standing there, spoke to Him in his mind, and asked Him to bless all. If it happened that he was too eager for food he expressed his sorrow and shame afterwards.

The poor starved saint was no doubt often hungry. We would perhaps like to point him to words such as "Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." But which of us is not reproved by his practice of consecrating his very clothing, and whatever food or drink he partook of, to God?

When called to the gate of the monastery he carefully observed four rules he had made for himself. First, to receive everyone with kindness; secondly, to speak as briefly as possible; thirdly, to dismiss him consoled and comforted; fourthly, to return with a heart unstained and unspotted. When he had to go forth from the monastery he was as watchful and timid as a deer venturing from its hidden

thicket into the wide unsafe woods. Of his practice of silence we have learned already, nor was it only at table; he shrank from losing the inner peace by talking easily or lightly and disciplined his tongue on all occasions; especially when he was conscious of having committed some fault. He then allowed himself no single word until the inner process of confession, obtaining forgiveness and cleansing had restored him. He then "buried the old man" and restarted his practices with new zeal.

We may think he was now on the high road to sanctity and had only to go on as he was to reach the goal. But the "old man" of our nature has a tough life: those whom God has called to serve Him well have a long and hard school to become fit for such service.

"When the way of perfection was shown to me," says a mystic of our own times,¹ "I learned that to become a saint a person has to suffer a great deal. . . . I learned that there are many degrees in holiness and that each soul is free in its response to our Lord's invitation to do much or little for His love—in other words, to choose from among the sacrifices that He asks for."

Suso found that the choice had to be repeated more often than he thought. On one occasion when he was crossing the lake of Constance to fulfil a preaching engagement in the country he heard people talk of knights fighting in a tournament so strenuously that blood came from their mouths and nostrils and fire from their eyes, yet never wearing a sad or depressed air. "My God," thought Suso, "they do this for earthly honour and prizes, what ought one not to suffer to gain eternal life! May I be counted worthy to become Thy spiritual knight!"

Arrived at his destination, dreadful physical suffering befell poor Suso; he immediately forgot about heroism and

¹ Theresa of Lisieux. Quoted from Gheon, *The Secret of the Little Flower*.

knightliness so completely as to lose confidence in God also. Next morning when his soul was again quiet and collected God rebuked him for this severely. Abashed, he asked at least to be allowed to weep in his distress, but received the answer: "You should be ashamed of yourself. Do you want to cry like a woman? You shame yourself before all heaven. Dry your tears and look joyful, that neither God nor men may see you have been crying because of suffering." Suso began to smile while tears were still running down his cheeks and promised to cry no more.

For ten years after his conversion he lived in retirement. But not in peace. The young theologian was deeply troubled by doubts. The mysteries of faith perplexed him desperately, his reason could not cope with them; how, for instance, could God become man? Why was the anger of God so often mentioned in the Bible when He is said to be Love? And why does God so often withdraw from His friends when they so earnestly desire Him? Why does He bring them into such deep tribulation? The more he tried to reason out these problems the more deeply he became entangled in further contradictions till darkness covered his soul. For eight years such sadness and melancholy hung over him "as if great mountains were pressing him down." He got to a state where he could neither pray, nor read, nor do anything good. As he sat thus one day in soul sickness and sorrow he offered God this, just sitting alone in his cell for love of Him; for of any spiritual exercise he was wholly incapable. He heard the words in his heart, "Arise. Consider My suffering, then you will conquer yours." He took it as a voice from heaven and obeyed. The darkness lifted. Certainties of faith began to shine out.

The darkness returned at times; but never again so heavily, and relieved by hours when heavenly light shone so brightly that he saw and heard unspeakable things. "If that is not heaven," he said after such a visitation of grace, "I don't

know what could be. My God, where was I? and where am I now? Never can I forget this."

The Eternal Wisdom enlightened him in some of his problems; why God withdraws Himself, and why tribulations come. "God rejoices in the soul that desires Him. To remain steadfast in intention to Me when feeling forsaken is the highest surrender. I often come to My house, and am either not received at all, or soon dismissed. I come and dwell so secretly in My beloved ones that only those perceive it who are free from themselves and from all things. I can only be received in spirit by those pure in spirit.

"My true Presence you can never recognize better than when I hide from you. When I take away what is Mine from your soul you learn who I am and who you are. Of yourself you are all imperfection. If you feel My presence go within; change in your feelings is a game of love which in this life ceases with very few. If through weakness you cannot do without the sense of My presence wait for it patiently, and seek Me with all faithfulness. Whoso wants always to know God's indwelling and hear His voice has to be at home within himself always.

"How blessed is he who in this life has sought no joy but God, and suffered much for His sake. The soul can find no real rest until she is wholly united to God; the more she is loosened from all things the more free and independent she becomes. Therefore I cannot permit her to go after other things and to cling to creatures. But because by nature she inclines to this I block her paths and fence all gaps with trials, whether she likes it or not; so that she cannot escape me. I strew suffering along her path, that she may learn to find her rest nowhere but in Me.

"If you endure in your trials and temptations it will make you progress better than speaking about God with tongues of men and of angels and having all knowledge. To suffer

patiently is greater than raising up the dead or working other miracles."

In his fortieth year Suso received the clear inner command to cease from his bodily austerities and exercises. But when human nature began to flatter itself it might now live easily and comfortably it was made clear to him inwardly that up till now he had been but a pedestrian, now he must become a knight in God's school. Hitherto he had scourged himself with his own hands and stopped when he wanted to, now God would take this in hand and have him scourged by others, with shame, indifference and contempt. Hitherto he had swum as in a sea of heavenly feelings and emotions, now he was to know inner thirst and poverty till he wellnigh perished.

When he heard this poor Suso cast himself down with fear and trembling and prayed the Lord to spare him if it were possible, but if not, he resigned himself to His will. The Lord comforted him and said, "be of good courage! I will be with you and help you to conquer in all, through My grace." So Suso delivered himself into the hand of the Lord to do as He willed.

One morning as he sat in his cell thinking rather sorrowfully on these things he was told to look out of the window and learn something. He looked and saw a dog running about in the cloisters, playing with an old mat, pulling it about and tearing it. "That is how your brethren will treat you," he was told inwardly. "If the Lord wills it so," he said to himself, "accept it willingly and be as that rag, passive and silent however ill-treated." He went down and fetched the mat, which he preserved for many years and looked at whenever he was tempted to rebellion.

For a time the fulfilment of the prophecy was delayed. He felt urged to give up his retired life and work among men; he preached with such blessing and success that innumerable souls were brought to God through him.

But this excited jealousy. Whenever they could, some of his brethren sought and found opportunity to belittle him. Suso accepted it humbly. When someone insulted him he prostrated himself at the other's feet, and asked pardon if he had offended. Or else he smiled so lovingly at his enemies that their wrath and ill will evaporated; or sometimes they were brought to a better mind.

Not invariably, though, could Suso practise perfection. There were times when he indignantly turned away from mockers. Then he would immediately feel inwardly rebuked. "Remember how I did not turn My face from those who spat on it." He turned back and looked at them again with love.

When these trying persecutions first began he used to think "Oh God, if such trials would only come to an end!" But his Friend, the divine Wisdom, answered him: "You are not yet able to suffer as you should. When a trial comes you must not comfort yourself with the thought that it will end, and that then you will enjoy peace; you must submit to suffering while it lasts and be prepared for the next one; that is part of the training."

Suso learned by degrees to accustom himself to a succession of trials; like another and greater mystic he could say, "when one tribulation retreateth another cometh on, yea and while the first conflict yet lasteth on many others come unexpectedly one after another."¹ But he not only became used to trials; he learned to accept them joyfully as sent to him direct from God, and therefore evidence that God was thinking of him. Once when there was a surprising interval of quiet he was asked how he fared? "Badly, I fear," he answered; "I am afraid God must have forgotten me; for, against all custom, I have not been attacked either in my honour or my life for four weeks." But he had hardly finished speaking when a brother arrived in haste and told

¹ *The Imitation of Christ*. Book III, Ch. xx.

him of some knights who, angered at the conversion of the wife of one and the daughter of the other through his preaching, had sworn to take his life. They had already searched several monasteries for him. Suso felt consoled and thanked God that He was still remembering him.

In various strange ways such remembrances reached him. He was accused of robbing a church on one occasion; because a little girl of seven had seen him praying where soon after thieves broke in.

His writings were attacked. Once he was hauled before an ecclesiastical court in the Netherlands and accused by two of the most distinguished members of his order of heresy and leading the people astray. On the journey he fell violently ill and was so oppressed outwardly and inwardly that he came near to death. We are not told what happened in the court itself; as no condemnation is among his records we may presume he was acquitted.

Then trials touched him nearer home. His own sister fell into bad conduct; it became known that she had been seduced. In her shame and despair she ran away. Fingers were pointed at the brother of such a sister. The order was ashamed of him; his special friends withdrew and left him to himself. This also, his family honour, he offered to God as a sacrifice and then set out to save. Through cold and rain he went after the lost sheep, seeking it till he had found it. Not reproaches, but love were poured out on the erring woman, till her hardening heart softened and she let herself be taken back home by her brother. She repented and lived in virtue and piety the rest of her days.

It was an oddly credulous age. At one time a rumour spread that the Jews had poisoned all wells. Because at that very time Suso had gone on a journey suspicion fell on him that he had been bribed by them and acted as their instrument. It is briefly stated that on this account he was so persecuted that he was in constant danger of his life.

Perhaps it was through his sister's fall that his attention was drawn to other fallen women. He received them with kindness; so that those afraid to turn to sterner spiritual advisers came to his confessional. He tried to save not only their souls but to make a good life possible for them by assisting them in material ways. Some remained steadfast, but by many he was deceived and lost not only his money, but to some extent his good name. "Still," he thought, "I must try to bring to God not only the tame but the wild."

Having been called a robber, a poisoner, a heretic, member of a disgraced family, encourager of prostitutes, perhaps he thought he had made a complete sacrifice of his honour and good name. But the hardest was yet to come. One of these women whom he had tried to help had named an innocent man as the father of her child. Even this base lie had not moved Suso to cast her off; but when he found out that in secret she was continuing her sinful life he withdrew all help and assistance. This so enraged the woman that she now publicly named Suso himself as the father and actually sent the child to him.

It is easy to see what colour the innocent saint, with his kindness and his money assistance, had lent to the accusation. And now there was the baby on his doorstep! Another woman, possibly from motives of kindness according to her lights, went to him and offered to murder it secretly. His reply was, "the child has been sent to me by the will of God; I accept it with joy from God and no one else and will look after it." He blessed it, placed it in a home and became responsible for its education.

Naturally the fat was in the fire. His action could be believed by no one to be sheer unworldliness; it was an acknowledgment of guilt. The scandal spread far; the whole countryside buzzed with talk; those who had listened to his preaching with edification were offended. There they hit Suso on the raw. "Oh that I had died," he exclaimed, "before

this misery came upon me! all those who thought of me as a holy man now hold me to be a base deceiver!" Wherever he went shame and contempt was heaped upon him, and what he feared most happened. Two of his most intimate friends with whom he hoped to find understanding and relief turned completely against him. One of them heaped on him the coarsest and bitterest reproaches and declared their friendship to be at an end. His heart torn, Suso said to him, "Oh brother, if in the counsel of God it had been you who was thrown into this muddy pool I would surely have jumped in too and helped you out. But to you it is not enough to see me in it you want to push me in deeper still. I appeal to the pitiful heart of my crucified Jesus." His friend bade him be quiet and added, "you are done for. Your sermons and your writings will all be repudiated now and cast away." His other friends offered him similar consolation. He had indeed become the rag pulled about and torn by dogs.

He found it wellnigh insupportable. Though he remembered that the Lord had been forsaken even by His nearest disciples, and had permitted the betrayer to kiss Him, he said to Him in his heart: "Lord, if this Thy suffering friend had only one Judas he would try and bear it, but now every corner is full of Judases." He was given to understand that one is not to look on insulting enemies as Judases, but as instruments of God preparing the soul for holiness and blessedness to come.

Forsaken by all, despised and pointed at, his protestations of innocence disbelieved, he had also the humiliation of having all means of support withdrawn from him and of suffering actual want. In this bitter loneliness he had none but his Friend to whom he constantly repeated the unshaken prayer, "Lord, may Thy will be done."

The final issue of this matter was that the mother of the child died suddenly; the woman who had, next her, been the foremost in slandering Suso went mad and died also.

These events changed public opinion. They were taken to be divine judgments on liars and wrongdoers and to prove Suso's innocence. Everyone who had blamed and reproached him now hastened to show him respect and to pay him every possible honour.

But the lonely path Suso had trod had taught him to be independent of them. Even before the weather of public opinion had changed in his favour he had become so filled with inward peace and his soul so overflowing with light and grace that unceasingly he praised God for his suffering and would not have exchanged it for the whole world. He was shown that this fiery furnace had purified him of self-love and united him to God more than all the suffering he had previously undergone.

He became prior of the monastery, at a time of general poverty and want. It appears to have been a time of spiritual dearth as well as material, even in the cloister. Suso exhorted the brethren to pray and trust in God, but met little response; they thought him simple, a man having no knowledge of temporal things, and laughed at the idea of obtaining anything from God through prayer. But Suso held on to faith. The very next morning a wealthy man appeared with a large sum of money, saying God had urged him while asleep to take it to the prior. The needs of the whole community were supplied. "And many other times I experienced the providing kindness of God," he relates.

Our knight of the cross fought for the cause of his Leader throughout his remaining years by personal exhortations, public sermons, private letters and through publishing books. A few excerpts from letters and sermons may be quoted.

"Whoso would live and serve God aright must carefully examine the hidden folds and corners of his heart to see if things temporal do not still take up room. Should he find such he must forthwith give them notice to quit.

"When a man wakes in the morning he must lift his heart

to God and say, 'now, my Lord and God, I will begin afresh to renounce myself and all things for Thy dear Love.' And this resolve taken in the presence of God, he must carry out all day long, and as soon as he finds his heart settling self-lovingly on something, tear it loose and conquer himself. For in this true godliness consists, and without such self-denial none can attain to it, turn where he may. And in this he must endure to the end, for none can deny himself so completely that nothing remains in him in which to deny himself.

"Even in common actions of our human life one must not let natural instincts and appetites rule, but learn to say sincerely: 'My God, my Love, I eat to Thee, not to myself; not to myself, but to Thee, do I sleep, and live, and suffer; for Thy sake I deny all else.'

"Where is the man who would not like to be something, be it in nature or in the spirit. But this arrogance, that we each one want to be something, is the root of evil, it is the cause that we are so often displeased with God and men and live without peace and without grace. With a willing and thankful heart we must accept it if someone leads us to see our own nothingness; as long as a single drop of blood in us has not died we cannot truly say with Paul, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. He who wants to be something for God must have ceased to live to himself and to be something in himself. For of ourselves we are nothing, we are something only in Him.

"Nature certainly will wear a sour face when in the place of pride we have to put humility and self-denial; when however learned or eloquent we are we have to learn to be silent, not to defend ourselves when slandered, and to give place to the lowest when our own reputation and culture is so high. But it is that which comes so hard to nature which creates in us that free will which can conquer nature into the likeness of Christ.

"I know a man who was stripped of all that could have given him any joy in life; he was forsaken by all, and as one forgotten by God and men. In this state he became once very light and happy in his mind. What is it, he said, to his own heart, that suddenly fills you with joy to the very marrow? His innermost self answered him: The whole world has nothing that can give me joy. Not friends, nor riches, nor honour, are the cause of my joy, but just this, that God is so good, and that He alone can be my perfect joy.

"If your mind is to become fixed in God it has to be still. It must like to think about divine things, to speak little; to receive what is disagreeable straight from the hand of God, to bear the imperfection of your neighbour, to speak good of others, but not of yourself. A wise man in all his outward activity must steadfastly keep his attention on the inner life; not neglecting outward duties, but keeping alive holy desires and devotion to the Will of God, so that he may return quickly within himself. Then he will learn to go in and out and everywhere find pasture.

"A beginner in the way is easily led aside. If he wants to gain a firm footing in good he must turn away from what distracts him, he must be a pioneer and break a path into himself and learn to be at home within himself. Who so runs needlessly into distraction of outward things carries his own soul peace to market. 'Never have I gone out to men without returning less of a man,' said Albert the Great.

"It is a high mountain you are ascending; the path is slippery; not in one attempt can you climb it. A man must harness himself to good again and again, till he reach the summit."

In the year 1351 when he must have been about fifty years old, on the Sunday before Christmas he was withdrawn deep into the sanctuary of his soul and received an extraordinary illumination. He saw the whole world caught into the nets of Satan; the corruption in Christendom of

both secular and ecclesiastic professions. At the same time he was shown nine successive steps of returning to God, under the image of a high mountain which consisted of nine rocks one on the top of the other. What he learned then he published later under the title *The Nine Rocks*. In this he shows the gradual leading upwards of a soul escaped from the snares of evil, through denial of self and lifting up the spirit ascending higher and higher towards God.

He himself had found himself lifted to the ninth and highest rock which touched heaven, where could be found the door to the primeval Source of all things. He saw but few inhabitants there; they were looking weak outwardly, but inwardly shining as great angels with the Love of God poured out in their hearts, yet not knowing they shone. "They sometimes perceive a ray of the Supernal Light, telling them that the Portal to it is near. They are surrendered to God with their whole soul, they love poverty of spirit more than consolation and joy; their one desire is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. Their humility lets them see nothing in themselves of which to glory; they consider themselves lower than all, and know no one, in earth or heaven, whose equal they might consider themselves to be. They love all men, though they are dead to the world and crucified with Christ. They are the true worshippers, adoring the Father in spirit and in truth."

Suso was so transported by seeing their bliss that he humbly prayed the Lord to be allowed to dwell on this rock with these elect, though quite unworthy of it; or at least to be permitted to be their servant, though of that, too, he felt unworthy.

His prayer was heard; he was given more than he had asked, not only the high blessedness he had witnessed, but an insight into the great mysteries of the primeval Source of all things, whereby he was filled with such an overflowing measure of the love of God and of joy passing understanding

that henceforth he thought only of the salvation of men and was willing for their sakes to suffer all things.

In this, too, it seems God took him at his word; at the end of his book of *The Nine Rocks* he adds that after completing this writing God withdrew from him all the spiritual gifts related therein, and made him poorer than ever before, and as if he had never received anything from God, while assaulted at the same time by terrible inward trials.

And so this faithful servant following the way of his Master was perfected to the end through suffering. Nothing is known of his death, save that shortly before it he assembled many of his spiritual children, blessed them in the Name of the glorified Jesus and prayed that they might be kept from evil and receive the gift of eternal life. What he wrote to a friend sick unto death we may perhaps consider to have been his own experience at the last.

"Therefore lift up your heart and hand and eye to the heavenly country, and greet it with a full heart. Lay your will into the Will of God; accept from His hand all He would do with you, be it for life, be it for death. Whatsoever He does is a work of Love, even though it appear to you otherwise. Be not afraid; God's angels are round about you, surrounding you with help; the love of God which is more than we can ask or think, will save you out of all fears; trust in His goodness always. Farewell."

VIII

ANNA GARCIAS

"I HAVE the name of a saint, but she the works," said St. Teresa of her friend Anna Garcias who ministered to her for years. We owe the fact that we know anything about Anna to a spiritual adviser who ordered her in her late middle age to write her story, a command she obeyed in simplicity and humility.

She was born on October 1, 1549, in the province of Castille in Spain. Her parents owned a large cattle farm near a market town where Anna, the youngest of a number of brothers and sisters, spent a happy childhood. Her parents were charitable and pious; Anna recollects that every Sunday the poor of the neighbourhood were given bread and wine, and that sick people came for medicine; when her mother met a child crying in the streets she inquired if it had parents; if she discovered it to be an orphan she took it home with her and had it cared for. In this atmosphere that acknowledged God and where His laws were obeyed the little girl began very early to long to please Him and to fear offending Him. She says she used often to look for long out of the window in the hope of seeing God somewhere, although when other children called her to play she was quite ready to join in their games. But she also recalls saying to God before she ran to them, "let me now play with them, I will come back soon," and that she had a feeling that God was pleased with her simple request. When she was only nine she used to run away to church and pray there, often remaining on her knees so long that they became swollen; her sisters and brothers scolded her for this and similar practices she tried.

In her tenth year her parents died—a great grief to the

affectionate child. Her brothers sent her out to herd sheep. At first she found this very hard, but soon began to find comfort in the beauty of grass and trees, and especially the singing of birds; it seemed to her they called her to pray and helped her to realize the nearness of God. Indeed, to her unspeakable delight, the child Jesus came to her when she was alone in the wide fields; a companionship which made her feel that she was in paradise. She wanted nothing else and said to the Holy Child, "couldn't we climb some mountain far away and stay there? if only you will stay with me, I should not lack anything, nor need food and drink." It seemed the Child smiled at her and made her understand this was not asked of her. Such visits happened not infrequently; her happiness was so great that she forgot to go home; sometimes night surprised her still alone in the fields. Her family wondered what had happened to delay her, but she told no one of her experiences. A little cousin, however, living not far away and of like mind, gained her confidence; Anna suggested to her they should go away together to some lonely place, dressed as boys. The other girl—"wiser than I," said the autobiographer—"objected that these were not the days for such an enterprise, do believe me, we should meet a thousand dangers and difficulties." Anna, however, persisted and at last wore down the cousin's opposition; they resolved to get clothes suitable for hermits and go early in the night when everyone was in their first heavy sleep. "But God prevented us," Anna confesses; "my cousin could not find the street door all night; and I was unable to get over a barrier shutting me off from our courtyard. But had we not been hindered we should have gone, for we were quite determined on it."

Not the first, or the last, young people who dreamt of running away and carrying out some wonderful scheme! And found themselves prevented. Yet, looking at her later life, who can say that divine intimations that she was to go

far afield to serve God were not even then confusedly astir in the child's mind?

When she had grown to girlhood the question of her marriage arose. Her relations pressed proposals on the unwilling girl, who kept on refusing. At length she said, "if I can find a man, virtuous and pious, who does not sin, is humble of heart and beautiful to look at; one who will live with me in perpetual chastity and not hinder me in godly practices I will obey you and marry him. But if he has not these qualities I would not take him for the whole world. So far I have not seen such a one."

It is hardly surprising that she had not. She was not the only woman to dream dreams or to demand glorious perfections and heavenly harmony, instead of accepting a school and a discipline where great ends may be patiently achieved. Perhaps she had strong inner convictions that hers was to be a difficult path; for she withdrew from all social intercourse when men were about and her resolve to live singly became more and more fixed.

That, in those days, was possible only in the cloister. A priest who had newly come to their town told the family of a new foundation at Abila, and undertook to ask admission for her there. Anna was overjoyed and prevailed upon her brothers to take her to Abila. The sisters in the new convent (which was the first St. Teresa founded) treated her with great kindness; but nothing more was settled on that visit than the promise to let her know when she could come. Her brothers, seeing the austerity of the place, asked her in amazement: "whatever do you want to come here for? They are fearfully strict." Anna replied that to her they seemed holy, and that she felt as at home in the place as if she had lived there always. For the time being they returned home.

After this it seemed everyone's business to test her desire for the cloistered life. Her brothers thought it might not be God-inspired; but if it were, this would be proved by her

doing not only the humblest tasks but those requiring quite unusual strength. She had to do the work of a common farm labourer and carry loads requiring the strength of a man. When she did this the tasks were increased. The farm servants confessed that two of them could not do what she did by herself. Anna only laughed; loads seemed to her but the weight of a straw; she felt such extraordinary vigour that she ached to tackle the heaviest work. Harvesters bound their sheaves for her twice the size they did for men and believed it impossible that she could toss them on the waggon; but she threw them up easily, so that all stopped to watch her in amazement. Then she drove in the loaded waggon single handed. After this she was put in charge of two or three yoke of oxen for the threshing. These were such wild and unruly beasts that hardly anyone dare approach them. "But through the grace of God," wrote Anna, "they came when I called them, bent their heads under the yoke and let themselves be led like lambs." These feats led her brothers to think she must be mad and had better not be allowed much time for prayer as it only turned her head. But keeping her constantly employed did not answer either. Then they tried the opposite, were affectionate and kind, but asked her to meet friends whom they had invited and secretly instructed to talk her out of her foolish desires. But all attempts to change her purpose failed. Twice the nuns sent word she could come, and her family had not allowed her to go. But at last, conquered by her firmness, a sister and a brother accompanied her to Abila. Anna was of course thankful and glad; yet on the whole journey she was beset by terrible inward doubts and misgivings. Of these she dare not say a word, battling against them alone. When she reached the convent and entered it they vanished in a moment; such peace and content filled her as if she had reached paradise.

But this did not last; very soon after her entry she lost all inward consolations. "Oh Lord, what is this?" she com-

plained. "If I did not know Thee well I might believe Thou hadst deceived me in bringing me here; if I thought Thou wouldest forsake me I should never have come to this place."

In those days spiritual directors had perhaps hardly the knowledge with which in our day a Von Huegel or a Dom Chapman give counsel on states of spiritual aridity; their treatment, their potential fruitfulness and blessedness. The going in and out of tides, the changing seasons, suns and stars rising and setting, had not begun to appear to spiritual guides as indicating laws, and as parables of changes in the inner life; indeed, even now, it is perhaps only advanced souls who can accept not merely with equanimity, but with thankfulness, those conditions of dullness and dryness which are part of God's education for every soul seeking to be united to Him.

For poor Anna they lasted the whole year of her novitiate. But one day after her profession when she went into the garden a sudden recollectedness and fervour arose in her mind; in it the crucified Saviour appeared to her and said, "I thirst for souls. Consider this, and walk now in a different way than hitherto."

A flame of love sprang up in her soul, now wounded as His had been, with thirst for souls. She too would go the way of the Cross and suffer as He did. She started to practise the severest penances she could think of, depriving her body of necessary food and sleep and tormenting it in other ways. Her confessor noticed it and told her all this came from the devil, thus confusing and saddening the young lay sister not a little.

But at that time St. Teresa herself was prioress of Abila and Anna brought to her her bewilderment and continued strong longing for souls. Teresa comforted her. "It is all of God, not a deceit of Satan. Be of good cheer. My confessors caused me similar troubles; but they are not always sufficiently

experienced, though otherwise pious and learned men." Anna was much consoled. The fervours continued; day and night they burnt in her, food and sleep were forgotten. Then sensible Teresa said to her: "when the bell rings for retiring to rest you must stop praying and go to bed like the others." Anna obeyed, saying to God, "Lord, I am not permitted to talk longer to Thee; Thou must allow me to go to sleep." "Then I found," she continued, "that obedience to superiors is pleasing to God; He gave me sleep for the whole time appointed for it; when I awoke I found Him in my soul as if He had been waiting for me."

But after a time those experiences that other unified lovers of God have to go through came upon her; her health gave way under the continued stress of the onset of spiritual fervour. The bodily constitution of the young woman who had performed such marvellous physical feats in the harvest fields was not equal to enduring the strain of being possessed and ruled wholly by spirit. She became so weak as to seem near death. The doctors could not diagnose her disease; they gave her medicines which only increased the trouble. She could scarcely lift a hand or a foot. Teresa was going to Seville; Anna had greatly desired to accompany her, but in her enfeebled state this was impossible. Anna said to the Lord, "I did ask Thee for suffering; but now I see I am a great trouble here; I desire Thee to give me suffering which will not cause burdens to others; rather allow me to serve them." She received the answer that her prayer was heard. "You will suffer in company with My friend Teresa. Both of you will experience many trials in your journeys."

She remained unrelieved, however, and continued in this weak state until Teresa returned a whole year later. When Teresa arrived and found her still in the same miserable weakness, hardly able to move at all, she said to her the same evening, "come to my cell. Yes, I know you are ill, but come nevertheless." It seemed an impossibility to Anna;

but in obedience and faith she arose and found herself able to move and to reach the cell of the prioress. Teresa said to her: "you must minister to the other sick sisters, although you are sick yourself, for there is no one else to do it." Five sisters were down with fever. Anna listened in silence, but thought, "however can I do it? I can scarcely lift a foot." She went with incredible slowness, dragging one foot after the other, first to the kitchen to prepare some food for the worst patient whose chamber was on the top of a flight of twenty-four steps. Anna stood at the bottom, impotent, but saying to God, "help me up, I can't take another step." She looked up and saw the Lord at the top calling to her, "mount, My daughter," and in the same moment she found herself at the head of the stairs. The Lord went with her into the sick-room, leant against the pillow like a nurse and said to her, "put your things down and go to the others, I will see to this one." She obeyed, hastening as much as she could, because of the urgent longing to return quickly and enjoy the presence of the Lord. She could move much better; but when she had attended to the others and came back the Visitor was no longer there. The sick sister was smiling and full of happiness; "whatever did you bring me, Sister?" she asked Anna, "never in my life have I eaten anything so delicious." Anna said nothing of the Presence she had seen, but later on asked her if anyone had been with her while she was eating? "No," said the patient, "but a wonderful consolation and strength came into my soul, so that I felt quite strong." She recovered almost at once and remained well, and so did the others.

Another time Anna had to nurse a very sick sister; while the patient was asleep she retreated to the cellar to gain undisturbed quiet for prayer. But suddenly she heard the inward command: "get up, My friend." "Yes, Lord, what is it I am to do?" she asked. But receiving no answer she ran upstairs to see what was wanted and found she had been

searched for everywhere as the sick sister was asking for her; Anna found her very weak and ill.

Later on, the prediction that she would meet many trials together with Teresa was amply fulfilled. Anna was Teresa's companion in many of her journeys and not only shared her deprivations but felt them doubly on account of her beloved Mother, "I felt her suffering more than I can express," she writes. "She was often ill and I was unable to obtain at the inns what might have refreshed her in her weakness. This saddened me deeply."

"When Teresa was making a foundation at Villa Nova de la Xara the workmen accidentally dropped a well wheel on her arm, the one that had been broken before. She bore it in great patience and peace. Soon after an abscess formed in her side, causing her such pain that she seemed like to die. But I should never be able to tell all that she suffered during the years I lived with her. In her books she hardly mentions any of it."

"At one time when she was in a state of great weakness we had nothing but a piece of dry bread. This was consumed. Our house was by a river just then in flood, cutting us off from the town, as the road was several feet under water. The house itself was old and falling into ruin; with the water swirling round and waves breaking against it it shook and trembled and threatened to fall in. From the room in which Teresa was lying you could see the stars through the roof; the walls were cracked and the cold penetrated into the house everywhere. Presently Teresa said to me, 'do see if there is not some bread left and give me a small piece, I am feeling very weak.' This tore my heart. A young probationer, of very strong physique, offered to go to the town; the water came up to her waist, but she got us a little bread.

"I had two thin covers on my bed; one I spread over Teresa, the other I hung round her bed, for the wind was blowing in everywhere. While she slept I washed her linen;

it was my special joy to provide her with clean things. Many nights I had no sleep in order to supply her with necessities. But I was kept as well and cheerful as if I had had my ordinary sleep. God must have done this to comfort Teresa; for had she perceived that the small services I rendered her meant any hardships, she would not have permitted them, or else suffered greatly at being the unwilling cause. But how grateful was I, who from childhood had longed to be acquainted with a holy soul, to be allowed to be near her! For fourteen years I had this great joy, and whatever time I had with her was always too short. She, too, was pleased to have me about her, and it was in my arms that she died."

The biographer passes over without a word the grief that this loss must have meant to Anna's loving nature; he only mentions he must omit much she had to say about Teresa's last illness.

"But now," says Anna when writing her story towards the end of her life, "I am much more inclined to love those from whom I can expect no consolation or profit. I am as if alone in the world, but I love all for God's sake." We may guess at the long story of soul discipline that filled the years between Teresa's death and the perfect work wrought by patience and endurance of grief.

All these years she was a lay sister, but in that humble capacity found all the opportunity needed for growth in saintliness and opportunity to serve others. During her stay at a convent in Madrid a deplorable state of alienation had arisen between the prioress and the sisters. No details are given, but it is not hard to picture the jealousies or suspicions so easily arising in communal life. The humble lay sister was keenly aware of them. Her constant longing was to see all the members living in harmony and spiritual union. Perhaps in the share she took to bring it about we may discern the mantle of wise Teresa fallen upon her? She served all with equal love and everyone trusted her. When the nuns poured

out to her complaints against the prioress she said to them: "you must understand that our Mother loves you all and seeks only to help you; try and confide in her; why not ask her for an interview? I know for certain she wishes to serve you in all ways that are permitted." Having given this counsel she went to the prioress and without mentioning the nuns' complaints, said to her, "Reverend Mother, the sisters love you dearly; they may want to speak to you and tell you their troubles. Should they do so I beg you to encourage them, for they are very timid. Please receive them kindly if they come, and help them to say what they want, for though good and devoted they are reserved and cannot speak out easily; please make it easy for them."

We are not told whether her kindly diplomacy was successful; not wholly certainly, she says that for three years she had to struggle for peace in the community, and had herself to suffer a good deal in the effort. But her complete disinterestedness won its way; the nuns recognized in her a true spiritual helper and begged so long to be permitted to start again the practices and instructions given to postulants, with Anna as their instructress, that the prioress gave way and permitted the unusual course of a lay sister, supposed to be used only for kitchen work and manual labour, becoming the novice mistress, with professed nuns taking the course under her.

During those three years, Anna says, she was inwardly absorbed in God the whole time; it was as if she were in a strong fortress where one might rest and sleep without carefulness. Work and duties interfered in no wise with the sense of the presence of God. Not that she was spared trials. Once she took some food to a sick sister. The patient said something very wounding and insulting to her; Anna said no word in reply, nor showed that she had perceived the sting. Only a great compassion filled her. Then she heard, as in a living voice, the words: "God is love; and who

abideth in love abideth in God and God in him." Her heart was filled with joy unspeakable.

How simple it seems as we read. All that any of us have to do is to abide in love; to respond to everything that comes to us from without, however unloving or stupid, with good will. But there, for most of us, lies the crux!

From Madrid Anna was moved to Abila; the sick prioress there desired her as nurse, having a special affection for her. But alas for changeable human nature; Anna soon saw that the prioress preferred others. Anna only redoubled her zeal in serving her, taking no notice of being received coldly, ascribing it to whims caused by illness. Once when she had prepared a dish with special care and begged the prioress to take only a little, the patient not only refused even to taste it but rudely ordered her from the room. Anna went, recognizing the occurrence as a fine chance to learn self-abnegation, and willingly embraced it.

Another and different opportunity arose soon after, this time a straight call for the flesh to be crucified. A nun who was a very pious and advanced soul fell ill of what was pronounced to be leprosy. The doctors advised removing her from the convent. But Anna and another nun felt urged to offer to nurse her. The prioress, who had been very troubled and puzzled what to do, was greatly relieved by this offer and accepted it.

The two devoted nurses found they had a hard task. The smell from the running sores was so offensive and so strong that others could not even pass the sick-chamber. Anna, who was also portress, did not neglect the duties of this office throughout these weeks; she worked hard to do all she could for the patient during the day, and during the night washed out clothes and bandages. These were so full of evil-smelling matter that "it could not have been borne by anyone unless their mind was wholly directed towards God." The body of the poor sufferer seemed to be dead already, but the soul

was full of courage and faith. The two women who looked after her did not feel the loss of food and sleep, only a great love and willingness to serve. Did they between them create an atmosphere from which the forces of evil were compelled to retreat? And where divine powers of healing could work undisturbed? After forty days the patient completely recovered and was as healthy as if this illness had never befallen her.

And now a new and different discipline was approaching for Anna. Abila had been her first spiritual home, it held beautiful and sacred memories of her Mother Teresa; the general atmosphere there was one of affection and trust and real devotion; it was in truth the atmosphere we generally imagine to pervade the cloistered life. Perhaps we also imagine that none of our problems could come near them, they were provided for, if meagrely; if their lives were narrow they were at all events sheltered; it might at times be difficult to get on with one another; but on the other hand, the trial of having to face new ventures, doubts as to what to do, fear of the future, uncertain careers in strange and unsafe surroundings—all these things that make life so perplexing and hard to us moderns and faith in God and divine leading so difficult, these were spared those simpler souls in those more primitive times. So we think. But perhaps God's education of souls is not so different in different ages as we assert. In reality life was no more simple in those days than it is in ours.

To Anna came an inward impression that she was to go to France. She was afraid, her whole nature shrank from the idea in fear. Then she heard the voice of the Lord saying, "have not grapes and olives to be passed through the press to give their juice? All My friends have gone this way." Slowly she gained courage and laid her will into the Will of God, to do bravely whatever He would ordain.

This happened when some eminent clerical messengers

were arriving in Spain to ask for some sisters of their order to be sent to France to make similar foundations there. The Spanish ecclesiastical authorities considered the matter carefully, but came to the conclusion it was not advisable to accede to the request. Anna, who had hailed the news of the arrivals and their proposal as confirmation of God's intimation to her own heart, was cast into bewilderment and doubt. Had it been God who spoke to her? Uncertainty dragged on. For a whole year the French messengers had to endure troublesome and humiliating opposition and refusals. Anna declares she was "so confused, distressed and filled with fear I did not know where to turn. Afraid of being deceived by the devil I wept day and night and prayed to the Lord not to let me be deceived." And then, in some mysterious way which she does not further elucidate, she says simply, "God made other souls understand that it was His will I should go."

The authorities changed their minds. The request from France was acceded to.

It was decided to send Anna and others. Not only the convent but nearly the whole town commended her to God. All the sisters were very sorrowful at the idea of her going away to another country. So was Anna herself. "For this convent of Abila," she says, "was truly a house of God where all loved one another, even me who was of all the most unworthy."

Her life with Teresa must have given her experience in travelling about and starting new ventures. But it had always been in their own land. This journey was to be into another country whose language she did not know. The woman brought up on a farm shrank from the idea of foreign cities. The courage following upon her vision wavered again; fresh doubts beset her. How would she stand the journey? She would probably die on the way, and be no use to anybody. And then the foreign language and foreign customs, and she

quite uneducated, no one knowing her or caring for her, while here at home rich love surrounded her; "it is not credible," she writes, "how Satan and my own nature tempted and frightened me; my mind was a mass of anxieties and fears. But while struggling against them and being pulled this way and that, encouragement came to me from some friends, and in my mind I felt again the irresistible urging from the Lord."

So the resolution was taken. On August 29, 1603, this woman of fifty-four started in company with three nuns on the journey to Paris, where they did not arrive till the following April; presumably they made prolonged stays on the way. There were various incidents; once before arriving in Bayonne darkness overtook them while they were still among the mountains. A fearful storm burst; the rain came down in torrents making the roads and further progress impossible; without shelter of any kind they had to pass the night in the open, nor had they food, and only such water, says Anna, "as was coming down in unnecessary abundance from the sky." To add to the terror of the inland-bred women they could hear the roaring of the sea, thundering against the rocks, which to them seemed sinister and horrible. Another time the horses shied while they were crossing a bridge, two wheels were over the edge; the coachman in confusion tried to drive straight on, the coach upset into the valley below full of stones and thorn scrub, with Anna underneath. All screamed that she was dead, but she cried to God and felt neither stones nor thorns nor any pain. "I had a feeling," she relates, "as if hands had stopped my fall and were saving me from harm."

When they at length arrived in Paris, her first care was to look after the food of the sisters, this being the duty of the lay sister. Of the new foundation nothing is related; perhaps for the time being they stayed in a convent already established. But Anna's joy in ministering to others in humble

and accustomed ways was interrupted. Her superiors insisted on her submitting to their command to become a fully professed nun. The white veil of the lowly lay sister employed only in domestic work and personal service to superiors, was to be exchanged for the black veil, permitting the wearer to be called to any of the higher offices. Anna was very afraid; also she thought it would be greater perfection to refuse this change; but her fears and scruples had to give way to obedience. Only eight days after her profession she was sent to Pontoise, there to start a new convent, with herself as prioress. "I was so tormented by fear," she writes, "that I could not express it. I prayed, and the Lord said to me, 'be of good courage, I have you in My heart, and I remain in yours.' Though this consoled me much, my timidity and sense of incapacity were so great that I fell back into my former sadness and fearfulness. We were received with great reverence and ceremony at Pontoise, but that only added to my heaviness of heart; to be in the position of Superior was a kind of torture to me; it cost very great denial of self to accept it; I considered it shame and humiliation for me, and indeed, never had I better opportunity to despise myself than in this office. I prayed the Lord to help me, because I was utterly alone and forsaken, and He said to me, 'I will keep thee as the apple of My eye.' His divine assistance never failed me, though so many and heavy distresses came over me that they might easily have borne me down altogether.

"Once I complained to God and asked why did He leave me in this office? seeing how poor I was, and nothing, just an empty straw. He answered, 'with straws I light fires.'

"In those days my manner of prayer was in this wise: there dwelt and shone in my soul a Light towards which I felt such reverence as if all the capacities of my soul had lost their being and efficacy, and received again from this Light their

being and efficacy. It was not as if I saw Jesus, as I used to, but as if the Most Holy Triune God were present in me. Though my soul saw nothing it was filled with such adoration of the Triune God as if she could see Him."

But this humble soul, thinking so little of herself, was nevertheless strong and independent when need arose. "Though I am so far from perfect," she writes, "God gave me this grace that never in the least detail did I act against my conscience and my duty. In this I had no regard to any man whoever he might be; nor feared I any loss that might accrue; I welcomed being alone and without friends because I had sought only to do the Will of God. When my Superiors saw that I would not follow their opinion in everything they withdrew the love and affection formerly given to me." Manifestly there was some friction between her and religious authorities.

Within the new convent itself, however, things seem to have gone remarkably well. The nuns under her were of such lovely dispositions as to appear very angels to their Mother Superior; and holiness and grace in the convent filtered through into the town whose inhabitants vied with one another to show love and honour to the prioress. Into this happy state fell a bolt from the blue; an order came from Paris that Mother Anna was to go to that city as prioress of the convent there. All were distressed, most of all Anna herself who dreaded the terrible worldliness of Paris. She poured out this dread before the Lord, and at the same time her contrition for not being able to accept what she felt to be the Will of God more calmly; finishing with the resolute prayer, "do with me as Thou wilt. I see I am not fit for it, that is why I am afraid; and it is a torment to me to receive honour." Then the Lord answered her, "those that do God's work on earth must walk thus, as I did; troubled when they are honoured, joyful when suffering." Anna consented to go where she was sent. But others were not so trained in

obedience; the town people planned to hinder her departure by force. She left secretly by night.

In Paris she was warmly welcomed by her nuns. For the first year of holding office there she had great joy in training them; they were all beginners and eagerly strove to walk in the way of discipline and instruction. They were mostly of high aristocratic lineage, "yet of such simplicity and singleness of heart as little children; they trusted me as if I had brought them up. But though I rejoiced in the beauty of their life and character, I did not lack suffering because of the burdensomeness of my office. When I considered my unfitness I became very sad; to me it seemed the greatest humiliation possible to be placed in this position. It does seem a pity that those who are fit to help souls do not make it their special business, and that those who are quite unfit, like myself, yet have the courage to attempt it."

In his *Spiritual Letters* Dom Chapman wrote this wise remark, "If you thought you were being made humble you wouldn't be." So perhaps the only way to become and remain fit to help others is to be sincerely convinced of one's unfitness? Modern psychology has a word to say on "inferiority complex." It is a question too complicated to venture on here whether the consciousness of our incapacity to meet the claims and demands life makes upon us is in reality one of the dim guiding lights implanted in our nature to lead us to the true Source of Power?¹

"Our sufficiency," said one of the greatest of mystics, "is of God." How very simple it sounds, and how simple those who achieved living with God found it!

"Once when it was my turn to take the Chapter (address of exhortation) I asked God for His grace and Spirit, that I might say to the sisters what He willed, and that they might not think of me, but of God, and of what they heard. I felt that my request was heard, joy filled my heart, I saw myself

¹ Pathological matters are, of course, not alluded to.

transformed into a different spirit. I held the Chapter with great peace and assurance, though holding it was unusually a great self-denial to me. As the sisters went out they said wonderingly how very near God had been to-day; never had they so felt His presence. I knew well that the words I had to say had been put into my mouth. This happened repeatedly, but never so remarkably as on that occasion.

“Another time when it fell to my lot to make peace between some persons and I did not know what to say, I asked God for light and wisdom for this task; I felt our Lord come near giving me strength and meekness to present the truth so wisely that everyone could accept it. And they all did accept it and believe it. I spoke as the Lord gave me to speak; though the words came from my mouth they had the effect as if He Himself had uttered them.”

But how are we who live to-day in what are surely far more complex and exacting conditions and in far greater insecurity, to learn this? Perhaps some of the advice Anna gave her nuns will not come amiss to us.

“Whoso denies himself and his own will and desires nothing but to submit to God’s pleasure, and for His sake accepts even the judgment of another, can say truly, I live, yet not I, but Christ.

“In all things one must have the wholehearted intention of doing them, or suffering them, for the love of God. At all times take refuge in prayer; this is the nearest and surest way; for Christ says ‘ask and it shall be given to you.’

“I remember our being in want often, and having nothing to eat; but withal there was such a superabundance of spirit that the sisters did not feel their poverty, being filled inwardly with consolation and joy.”

Perhaps to read of their attainments makes us only sigh and feel the more conscious of how far we are from sharing them. And indeed there is no royal road. But they, too, had to start walking on it and obey its laws.

"It is silence," Anna taught her daughters, "which makes a soul receptive for communion and intercourse with God. Through silence one grows wise; for one hears the Lord speaking inwardly; to listen to Him is to learn wisdom.

"A soul cannot be spiritual if she does not withdraw herself as often as she can from her outward works and business, and remains recollected in a deep silence; it is there she will find what she seeks, uniting herself to God. Such silence may lead a soul into a blessed darkness, where she may, as Dionysius says, discern a clear and marvellous light, or even a vision of God such as can never be explained.

"The reason why so few become truly spiritual is, as Bonaventura says, this, that they will not train themselves to listen to the voice of God. If they do not find any taste in prayer they soon give it up and seek consolation elsewhere.

"A prioress, or any religious teachers, must conduct themselves so that their pupils may read in their lives what they are telling them in words. For thus will the pupils learn the habit of drinking the Water of Life for themselves."

How hard it may be at times for the spiritual teachers to maintain this habit our saint had to learn herself by new and formidable lessons.

"After being in Paris for about a year," she relates, "all my inner joy and comfort, and the happiness I had in my community, were changed into sadness and desolation. Our Superiors began to imagine things about me of which I had never dreamt. The Lord hid from me; I seemed to have lost all faith. Nor had I anyone to whom I could speak of my distress. God alone knows what my soul suffered then.

What cannot a soul resolve on, what sacrifice, what surrender, what intentions to please Him, as long as she has God present with her! How strong and immovable she then believes herself to be! But as soon as He hides from her only a little she believes herself sinking. Courage is gone, she loses all heart and all faith. I was not single-hearted enough

to use these trials aright; yet I somehow knew the Lord helped me to carry this cross, and that it was of great profit to me.

"Sometimes relief came, my soul grew calm, the Lord made me know I was in His hands; then I felt such a love for Him that at His order I would have leapt into the sea, or into a den of lions. I feared nothing. And even afterwards the Lord left His own strength in my soul so that these distresses no longer affected me.

"Nevertheless, they came on again; from day to day the buffetings increased; outward trials and inward disquiet grew more oppressive; the devil suggested to me I ought never to have come to France, that my labours here were quite useless and all efforts wasted; that God had forsaken me, and only damnation lay ahead. But he could not really confound me; I fell at the feet of God and prayed for mercy. He comforted me; though He soon left me to myself again. Once a person came to see me who used to love me formerly, but now she came in great frankness, not to say impudence, and began to take me severely to task, blaming me among other things for living without strictness or self-denial, indulging myself, and so on. I was ill with fever when she called, and just before her visit I had been bled; in this weak state it was hard to endure her attack; I was tempted to answer her so sharply that she would not repeat her call. But I only said that perhaps for to-day it had been enough. Afterwards I committed the matter to the Lord, and He said, 'why are you sad? Should you not rather be pleased to be talked against and called unworthy? Did they not say worse things of Myself?'"

Another time the Lord showed her a cloth in which were a number of little crosses, inviting her to accept them. Having the consolation of His presence she forthwith accepted, and felt immediately that they were entering her soul and becoming one with her. At the same time she was given

to understand that this was a high grace, since true perfection could be reached only through suffering; that all spiritual excellences were so indissolubly connected with the Cross that apart from it their glory and beauty would remain unrevealed and unattained.

We may surmise—though the autobiography gives no details, only mentioning that certain people caused her bitter pain and humiliation, and that neither within her community nor without it had she anyone to whom she could open her heart, that these many little crosses were laid on her through those to whom she owed obedience and submission.

While humbly and steadfastly carrying them succour came to her. "Once the Lord graciously visited me during prayer and changed me into complete union with Himself. Not for long, though the effect lasted for some time. The following day, after receiving Holy Communion, it happened again, and again passed; but for over a fortnight the effect remained. Though I saw nothing I was conscious of such majesty as if in the ground of my soul I had beheld the Triune God. It was a perception infinitely stronger than seeing. I had during those very days enough causes for anxiety and worry, but my soul was not moved by them, nor did the soul's eye become other than single whatever the occurrences. . . These things are hard to describe; I should never dare to write of them had I not been commanded."

Had she, in her willing and humble endurance, found the way to the most supreme experiences of which humanity is capable while still on earth?

The duties of her position she sought to fulfil with all possible faithfulness; part of them she felt was being the servant of all in the house. The meanest duties she took as her share of the common work, desiring to be the least and lowest, "as indeed I was."

After three years in Paris she was sent to Tours to found a new convent there. "This move was accompanied by great

trouble and many humiliations; yet inward calm did not leave me; though shameful slanders were spread about me they seemed to me like thorns at a distance, they could not touch me. In spite of all calumnies many noble and devout persons came from great distances asking to be admitted; in one day there were no less than twenty, for which we praised God.

"I was quite alone in this convent, having no director, or anyone with whom I could talk about my interior life; but I could bear it easily because the Lord now visited me with those graces He had formerly withdrawn from me. Sometimes I was so translated into His presence that I could say with Paul, who can separate me from the Love of God in Christ? If He had not strengthened my bodily nature I could not have borne it."

After nursing and guiding the new establishment at Tours for three years she was recalled to Paris. Anna must have found these many changes trying. She was now sixty-two. Most people at that age feel the need of a settled home, and are averse to venturing into new circumstances and to making fresh efforts in unknown places. That Anna felt as others do who are conscious of not only youth but middle age slipping past them, we may guess from this: when she heard of a new foundation being contemplated at Anthorf in Flanders she expressed the conviction this work would be laid on younger and more capable shoulders. When she was younger it had been hard enough to exchange one country for another. And now, when she was ageing, there surely would not be yet another? But that cross too, was laid on her. She was sent to Bergen in Hennegau to wait there for orders

A whole year passed. Then she was informed that the authorities had decided on her as the leader of the new cause. Courageously she refused to look at her age or unfitness, but put herself and the whole venture into the hands of

God and went forth. "And from the very beginning," she relates, "God sent us highborn, spiritually-minded, devoted and intelligent maidens, so that the whole town marvelled. We were so poor that we had no more than fifty guilders, and they were borrowed; we lacked all necessities, the Town Council was against us. But God changed their mind after a time; I was kept in great peace throughout."

Here her last years were spent; when she was over seventy she was consulted about yet another foundation at Lüttich; only women she chose should be sent there. "Someone else will depart before then," she answered, a prophecy which came true. For bodily illness and weakness had overtaken her by then. Several times she had a stroke and hoped it might mean the end, but she always rallied again, nor would she rest though often suffering greatly. When absolutely incapacitated by pain and obliged to take to bed she said joyfully, "now I have nothing to do but to obey God and my nurse; nor to wish, except that the will of God be done." In her last illness the Spanish Infanta sent her doctors and her own ladies to care for her, to the patient's great distress, "why all this fuss about a poor Carmelite? Oh Lord, may I not go from this world without noise?" That mark of high sainthood—believing oneself to be less than the least—was prominent in her. "Oh my sisters," she would say to the nuns, "how disgraceful it is to be thought what one is not! Pray God for me that He may give me light to know myself, and that no one may be deceived in me."

For two years she had to endure great bodily afflictions; but remained always collected and serene. Three days before the end her temperature rose high during the night, but she still got up next morning at the usual hour and went to receive Holy Communion; and in spite of great weakness only returned to bed at five o'clock in the afternoon when the fever was so high that doctors were called. The pain became so violent that she exclaimed, "how bitter is my

cup!" "Is it not drunk yet?" asked her nurse. "No, it is not finished, the bitter dregs yet remain," said the aged saint serenely; and, in truth, her sufferings became more intense. Then her tongue became paralysed; she could no longer speak, her face changed, with a smile she opened her eyes, looked upwards and thus radiantly beholding, passed on into the heavenly life on June 7, 1626.

ENVOI

ALL of us in reading these pages will feel inclined to say, who can live like that? In his introduction Tersteegen asks this question and answers: "*They* could. Therefore all can; through Him whose strength is made perfect in weakness. They were not born holy; they were of like passions with ourselves; they were weak beginners at one time; they fell frequently, but they got up again; they sinned; they were not made perfect in a day. They did not become holy as quickly as we read their story. The outcome of their walking with God is very lovely; we see its beauty; but the struggles, the trials they had to go through can never be known to us, however much they try to tell us of them. While undergoing them they must have felt as we do; but they held on to courage, kept on making fresh starts, looked away from themselves to Him who was the Author and Finisher of their faith."

These souls certainly went along a narrow way; too narrow, it may seem to some of us; they took it because they believed God was their Leader. What about ourselves? Can their way be meant to be our way?

Let us turn for the moment to some modern conceptions.

There are those who hold a theory of evolution signifying man's rise in the scale of being from lower organisms to ever higher and more complex ones, from protoplasmic cell to the marvel of the human frame; from the physical and muscular to the miracle of brains and thought; from the animal to the spiritual; this last—the most recent arrival on the human scene—pointing to the development of those spiritual organs inherent in mankind, but as yet little used or understood; the attention of men at our present stage being almost wholly engrossed with exercising the faculties of mind.

There are, on the other hand, those who hold a theory of evolution apparently diametrically opposed to this, as the school of Rudolf Steiner does, namely that man brought with him the consciousness of belonging to a high spiritual world, which he gradually lost. The Middle Ages still possessed this inheritance in part; in primitive peoples, and those who live simple lives, it still exists; but the modern world in general, in its conquest over matter and ensuing materialism, has entirely lost it. The time has come when it must rediscover its true Ego, or perish. It may well seem to readers of these pages as if the *Zeitgeist* of former centuries held a consciousness of God with a simplicity and directness absent from our own.

But whichever theory appeals to us as the true explanation of our history—the practical outcome for those now living is surely the same. Whether it be the rediscovery of lost treasures of the spirit, or whether it be the strenuous and costly development and exercise of faculties we are unaccustomed to use, in either case it is a turning towards the spiritual. When we reach this stage of the spirit; when we attain to, or rediscover, God-consciousness, it will surely be with the depth and richness which humanity's effort in other directions and its experience of tragedy and suffering are even now adding to its capacity for such a reception of God; as its hunger and its lack of self-sufficiency—in spite of its mastery over nature—is preparing the advent of spirit. The next age will be more spiritual than this. That Golden Age when mankind, trained not only in the exercise of reason and enriched by scientific knowledge, but habituated to the functioning of its spiritual organs, shall perceive the Rule of God on earth—lies ahead. And all who in this day and generation resolve to live to the Spirit and to banish fear help to bring that day nearer and are co-operators with God.

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